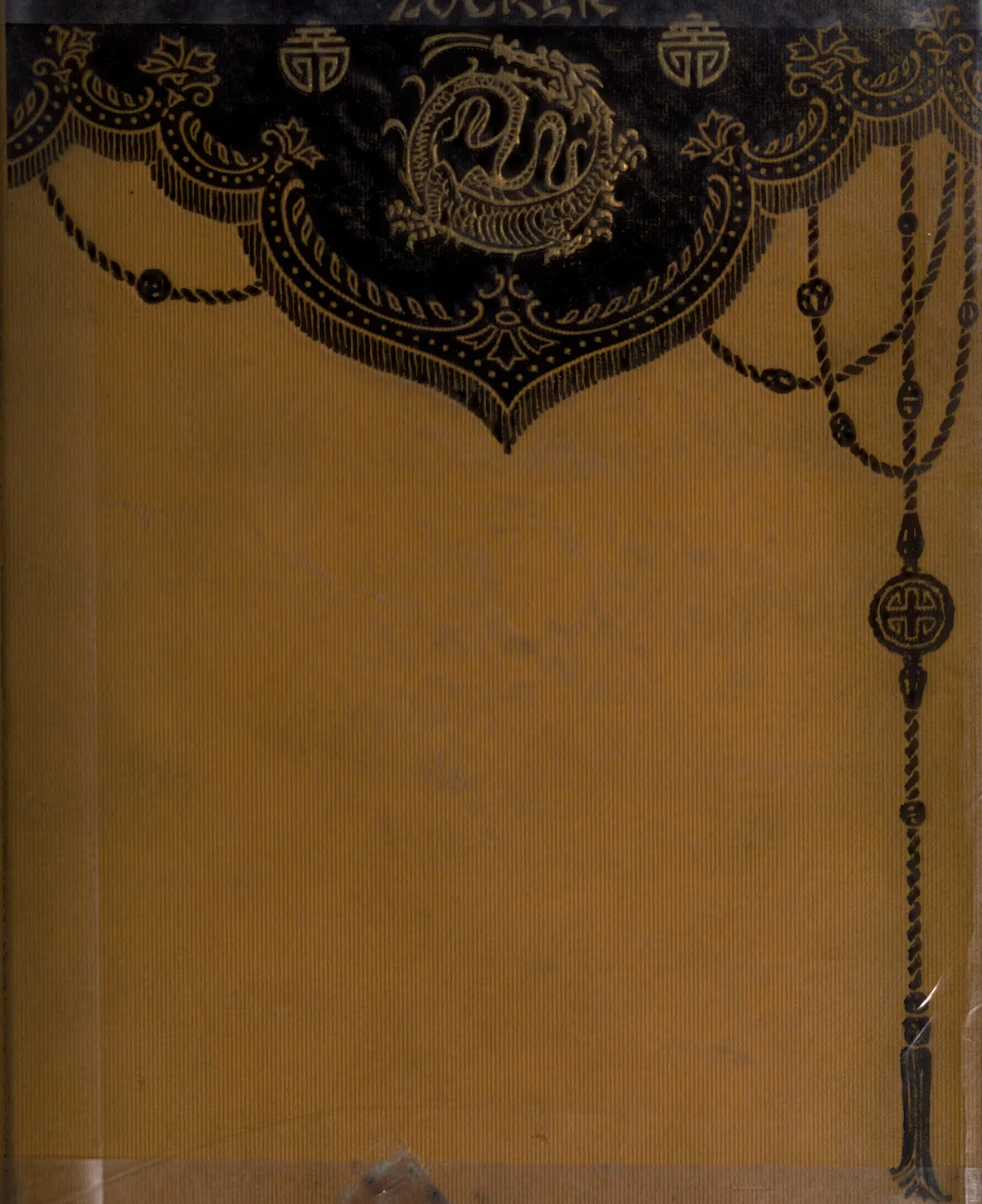


THE CHINESE THEATER

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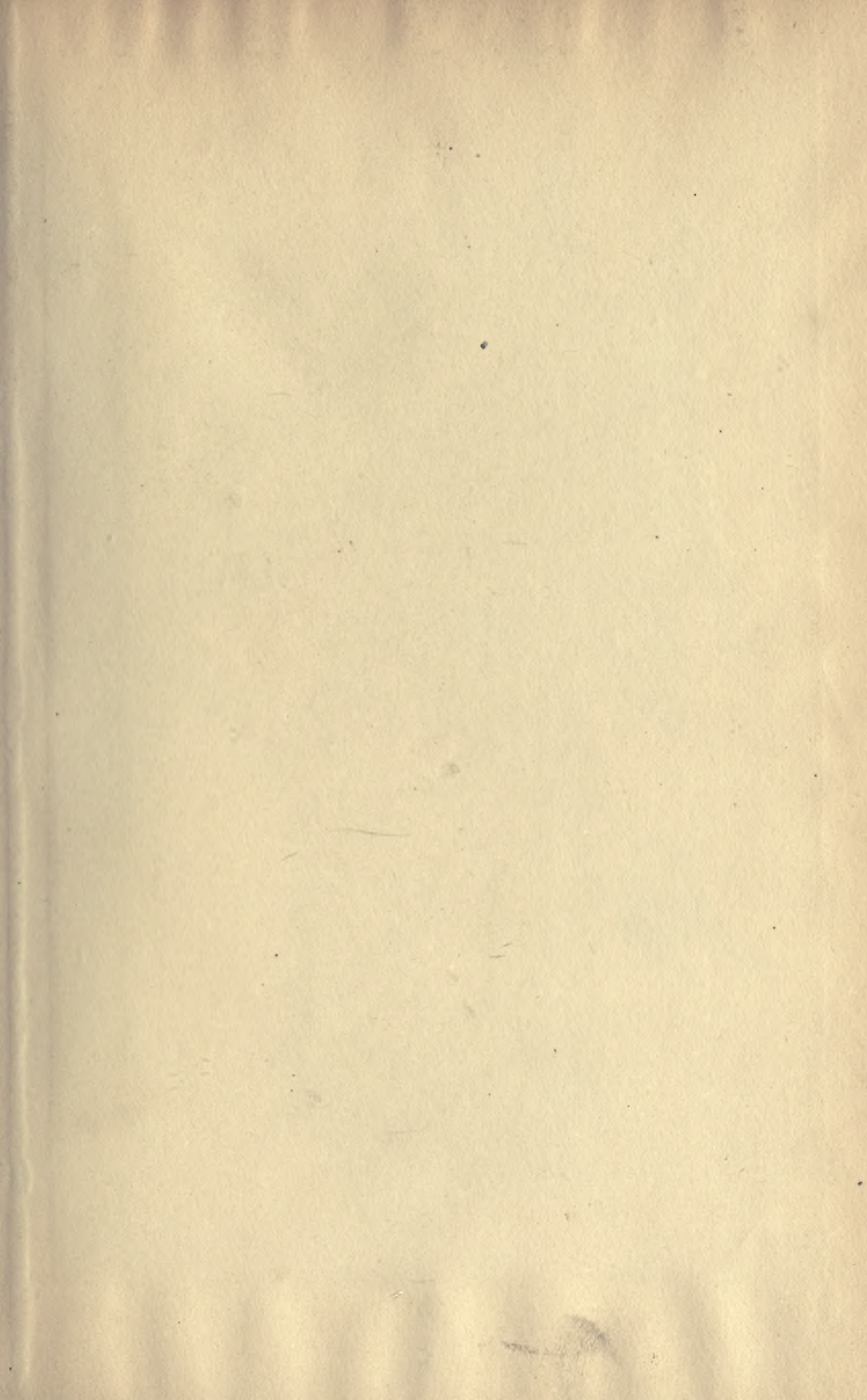
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THE CHINESE THEATER



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THE CHINESE THEATER

BY

A. E. ZUCKER

*Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Maryland
Formerly, Assistant Professor of English,
Peking Union Medical College*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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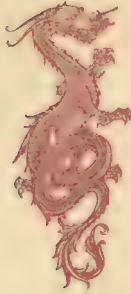
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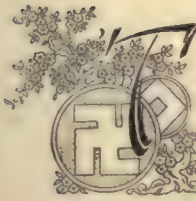


To

MY WIFE, LOIS MILES



PREFACE

HE genial Reverend Arthur Smith in his "Village Life in China" says that the Chinese sometimes finds it hard to understand the Westerner. As an instance he cites the case of a tired traveler who stops at an inn for the night and is told that there will be theatricals in the evening. Instead of sharing the glee of the natives, he gathers his tired self together and hurries on to the next village that he may enjoy his sleep far away from sounding brass and clanging¹ cymbal. Possibly this explains why among all the books written on China comparatively few concern themselves with the theater. One might add too that the drama stands on a relatively lower level than some other Chinese arts, for example, landscape painting and lyric poetry. Yet though his dramas are poor the Chinese actor has at his command consummate skill to hold the mirror up to life; he is no less of an artist than his Occidental colleague.

Still, the subject has attracted a fair number of

¹ As I find the Revised Version, with a fuller understanding of Oriental life, prefers to phrase it.

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Occidental writers. Du Halde was the first; in his monumental description of China published in 1735 he printed a translation by a Jesuit missionary of the Yuan Dynasty drama, "The Orphan of the Chao Family." It was this translation that inspired Voltaire's "L'Orphelin de la Chine." Other translations followed in the nineteenth century, together with some critical material and various descriptions of Chinese staging. In the last few years the interest in the Chinese stage has evidently become greater than ever, both in China and in Western lands. A history of the Chinese drama, however, has never been written; largely because the Chinese themselves have no such work. Only a few present-day innovators among Celestial scholars consider the drama as literature. Thus the information we possess on this vast subject is very meager, and much of it is also out of print. This book is an attempt to gather together what is known on the subject, as well as to present in a volume supplied with vivid illustrations the results of five years' experience with the Peking theater by a student of comparative literature possessed of a modest knowledge of the Peking dialect.

Those who have so far written on the subject have always spoken of a decadence of the drama which set in immediately after the first period of bloom in the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1368). In the course of the revaluation of values now going on in China this opinion is being changed. Mr. Wang Kuo-

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wei has recently compiled a dramatical catalogue which shows that numerically, at least, there is no decrease in the production of dramas. A trenchant critic, Doctor Hu Shih, holds that only technically can the drama of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) be said to be inferior, because the compact and unified plays of the Yuan period become diffuse and of serpentine length; but that in the matter of characterization, poetic diction, and content they are far superior. Furthermore, modern Chinese criticism considers the very highest point of the drama to have been reached in two historical tragedies of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911). As can readily be seen, there is an enormous amount of work to be done in this field; and if the gaps and errors in this book shall impel a competent scholar to write the long overdue history of the Chinese drama this work will have served its purpose.

In general the Chinese drama is like ours. It is divided into acts, often corresponding in number to our customary four or five. It is presented in a manner strikingly similar to that employed during our greatest period of the drama — Shakespeare's day. It can be classified according to content into our usual divisions. Historical drama prevails perhaps; because of the great love of the Chinese for his long tradition contemporaries of the Romans or even earlier heroes are favorites on the stage. Family drama is extremely popular, with subdivisions such as the drama of the court room and

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criminal drama. The magic or mythological drama, recalling perhaps "A Midsummer Night's Dream", is also very important; among this group the very best plays are those that treat superstitious beliefs satirically. Then there are dramas of character, among which can be found a good counterpart to "The Miser" of Plautus or Molière. Dramas of intrigue abound on every program. Even the monodrama can be found among modern innovations. And last, but by no means least, there is the religious drama in some ways analogous to our miracle and mystery plays.

The three chief religions of China have exerted their influence on the stage. Confucianism supplies the general moral background of the majority of plays. The veneration of the scholar rather than of the warrior makes the former the chief hero on the Chinese stage, while filial piety is the most outstanding virtue which the hero displays. Taoism, generally described as the religion of superstitions, is responsible for the many mythological and ghostly figures that fill Chinese plays. Rational Confucianism is not conducive to imaginative writing, but under the influence of Taoism the Chinese allowed his fancy to roam to the end that innumerable delightful fairy and ghost stories were invented. The keen sense of humor of the Chinese often comes to the fore in plays dealing with Buddhist monks. These monks are the exact counterpart of the lazy, ignorant, sensual, superstitious brethren who people

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the pages of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Hans Sachs, and many other tellers of droll tales. In fact when Père Prémave first came to China (around 1700) and saw the monasteries with the celibate monks, who abstained from meat, chanted offices, burned incense, shaved their heads, prayed with beads, and gathered money from the pious, he decided that this was an invention of the Evil One for the sole purpose of exasperating the Jesuits. With the exception of some satire on the migration of souls the doctrine of Sakyamouni has had little influence, but whenever chanting priests or monks are brought on the stage they are burlesqued. The Chinese are extremely tolerant in regard to religion and never fanatical; their attitude toward the supernatural has been aptly defined as "politeness toward possibilities."

But the main theme of the Chinese drama, as of all drama, is the human side of life. The stage is naturally enough a mirror in which we can see the Chinese as they see themselves. They present themselves not as the wise men of the East that some idealizing travelers would like to make them, nor as the bloodthirsty monsters of the "Limehouse Nights" brand; but as human beings, neither white nor black. We see the corruption of officials, the callousness toward suffering, the selfishness of parents, the eagerness for compromise, and the lack of physical or moral courage; on the other hand the polite civilization with its long tradition, the respect for the past and for learning, the love of poetry and

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art, the general kindness and honesty of the people, the love of humor, the extreme democracy in social relations, and the reasonableness and lack of fanaticism. He who would know the Chinese ought to know their stage; and furthermore, he who loves our Middle Ages will derive endless pleasure from its counterpart, the pageant of Chinese life.

In my years in the East I received helpful suggestions from many friends in the course of hundreds of visits to the theater. Professor Soong Tsung-faung first introduced me to this fascinating spectacle. Doctor Hu Shih discussed it illuminatingly in conversation and by correspondence. Lucius Porter, Professor of Chinese, Columbia University, 1922-1924, offered helpful suggestions on the manuscript, which he read in part, as did likewise Professor Ferdinand Lessing, formerly of the National University, Peking. Two of my students, Huang Ke-k'ung and Jung Tu-shan, who learned from me about Sophocles and Shakespeare, introduced me in turn to many fine things on the Chinese stage. And finally, I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Chang Ziang-ling and the many other *p'iao-yu* (amateurs) for acquainting me with the nonprofessional stage. Thanks are due to the editors of *La Revue de Littérature Comparée* and of *Asia* for permission to reprint a number of chapters.

A. E. ZUCKER

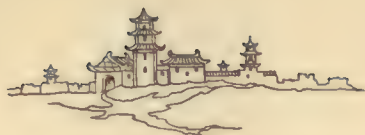
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For the purpose of giving a vivid impression of the colorfulness of the Chinese stage, the publishers have imported from China four thousand paintings on silk, done by students of the Peking School of Fine Arts. They represent four of the standing character type of the Chinese stage, in their traditional make-ups.

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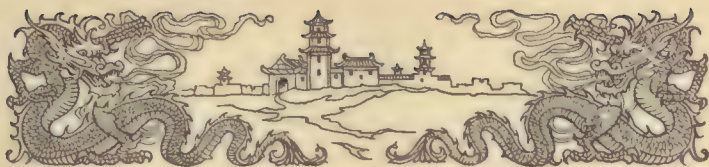
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THE CHINESE THEATER





CHAPTER ONE

EARLY HISTORY



STUDENTS of the Pear Garden" (Li Yuan Tzu Ti) is the name by which actors in China are called in elegant literary style. This appellation was given them in memory of the traditional origin of the Chinese theater in the imperial palace gardens of a T'ang Dynasty emperor, Ming Huang (Yuen Tsung, 713-756 A.D.), who was a generous patron of the arts in his splendid capital Ch'ang An. This ruler established a college called the Pear Garden for the training in music and dramatics of young actors of both sexes. His plan for court entertainment the emperor had derived, according to legend, from a visit to the moon where he had seen a troupe of performers in the Jade Palace of the lunar emperor. In the annals of the T'ang Dynasty the following is told about the art-loving ruler:

"Ming Huang was not only passionately fond of music, but he also had a thorough knowledge of its essential principles. He established an academy of

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music with three hundred students. Ming Huang himself gave them lessons in the Pear Garden; if any of the students sang in poor taste or incorrectly the emperor noted the fault immediately and corrected it sharply. The young girls of the harem, several hundred in number, were later also attached to the academy as students. . . . On the occasion of the emperor's birthday the empress ordered them to perform some musical numbers in the Palace of Eternal Life."

The French scholar Bazin in the introduction to his translation of four Chinese plays comments upon this as follows: "Surely it is a great thing that, at a time when the Chinese had as yet no idea of dramatic performances, a man who had founded the institution of the Han-Lin (literally 'The Forest of Pencils', i.e., The Imperial Academy of Scholars), and who could justly call himself 'the teacher of his nation', conceived and carried out single-handed a work of art, in which we find for the first time with all its marvelous charm the union of lyric poetry with the drama. This work, fitted to arouse in the souls of the spectators the sentiment of the sublime, could be the product only of a genius."

In "The Chinese Drama", William Stanton writes on the origin of the drama as follows:

The long reign of Yuen Tsung, styled the Illustrious Emperor (Ming Huang) owing to its splendid beginning and disastrous close, is one of the most remarkable in Chinese history.

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On ascending the throne, the young emperor zealously strove to purge the empire of the extravagance and debauchery that was ruining it; and in his austerity went so far as to prohibit the wearing of the then fashionable costly apparel, and, as an example to his subjects, he made a large bonfire in his palace of an immense quantity of embroidered garments and jewellery. Under the wise administration of this stern ruler and his able ministers the state attained a great height of prosperity. But unexpectedly the emperor's character underwent a change; he developed a love of sensuality and himself indulged in the luxuries he had formerly so strongly condemned.

In A.D. 734 he obtained a sight of his daughter-in-law, the beautiful Yang Kuei-fei, and became so violently enamoured with her that he took her into his own seraglio. She speedily obtained a complete ascendancy over him and succeeded in getting raised to the highest position next the throne.

According to legendary stories the Herdsman and Spinning Damsel are two lovers who each inhabit a star separated by the Silver River (the Milky Way) and are unable to meet except on the seventh night of the seventh moon, when magpies from all parts of the world assemble, and with their linked bodies form a bridge to enable the damsel to cross to her lover. Consequently this is one of the great festive occasions of China. On the said evening of A.D. 735, Yuen Tsung and his celebrated consort stood gazing into the starlit sky. Remembering the occasion Yang Kuei-fei burst into protestations of affection and assured the monarch that she was more faithful than the Spinning Damsel, for that she would never leave him, but, inseparably with him, tread the spiritual walks of eternity. In order to reward such love the emperor sought to discover a novel amusement for her. After consideration he summoned his prime minister and com-

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manded him to select a number of young children, and, after carefully instructing and handsomely dressing them, to bring them before the beautiful Yang Kuei-fei, to recite for her delectation the heroic achievements of his ancestors. That was the origin of the drama in China. The first performances were generally held in a pavilion in the open air, among fruit trees, and Yuen Tsung subsequently established an Imperial Dramatic College in a pear garden, where hundreds of male and female performers were trained to afford him pleasure. From the site of the college the actors become known as the "Young Folks of the Pear Garden", a title they claim to the present day.

The Pear Garden origin of the Chinese drama is a fine legend and heroic history, but it is typical of Chinese who have come in touch with Occidental science that they should search for a more realistic, if less picturesque, account of the beginning of their theater. The first, and so far the only, systematic and scientific work on this subject is "The History of the Drama under the Sung and Yuan Dynasties", by Mr. Wang Kuo-wei.¹ This author has taken great pains in collecting all evidences of pantomimes, dramatic dances, satirical buffoonery, or anything else to which the roots of a theater might be traced. While he is not yet able on the basis of his evidence to lead us back step by step to the genesis of the theater—as could for example a scholar dealing with the Greek drama—yet the evidence he adduces is most interesting.

¹ Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1915. — A small volume of about 200 pages. Not translated into a European language. — The same author has issued a "Dramatical Catalogue", same publishers, 1917.

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About 2000 B.C. there were found mediums called *wu* when they were women or *hsien* when men, who performed dances and sang songs in the worship of the gods, to exorcise evil spirits, to induce the gods to send rain, or to act as mourners in times of calamity. It was believed that the gods descended to earth and communicated with men through these mysterious beings, especially in the course of violent dances. This form of worship designed for the pleasure of the gods was evidently much according to the taste of men, for we find it such a widespread form of popular amusement that I-Yin, famous minister of the Shang Dynasty (1766-1122 B.C.), issued an edict prohibiting it. "The late sovereign instituted punishments for the officers, and warned the men in authority, saying, 'If you dare to have constant dancing in your mansions, and drunken singing in your houses, I call it wu-fashion'." ¹ During the classical Chou Dynasty, beginning 1122 B.C. with Wu Wang, everything in Chinese life was cast into the fetters of a strict ritual. There were regulations governing the dress to be worn, the speeches to be made, and the postures to be assumed on all possible occasions, whether at the court or in private life; in fact, these rules were the prototypes of most of the characteristic features governing Chinese public and social life down to the present day. It can be seen readily that the more or

¹ Quoted by De Groot, "Religious Systems of China", vol. VI, p. 1187.

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less spontaneous and popular mimicry of the *wu* (mediums) would naturally enough be suppressed at this time; but in later dynasties we find again many references to the beauty, the splendid costumes, the singing and dancing, and in general the charm of these actors in popular religious ceremonies.

These performances of the early Chinese centered about the divine worship, as everything of æsthetic nature in the life of primitive man seems to do. Even to-day all of the theatrical performances in China outside the large cities are a form of divine worship, usually harvest festivals staged by way of thanksgiving for good crops. That there is in the minds of the Chinese a definite religious association with theatricals performed in the villages is shown by the fact that the Christian converts always receive a dispensation for their share of the sum demanded by the traveling company. Sometimes missionaries hear complaints from the village elders that some thrifty members of their flocks save the tax for theatricals and yet go to look on at the shows; however, thanks to the reasonable and un-fanatic character of the Chinese such quarrels are usually easily adjusted.

Because of this close association of the theater with temple worship,¹ it seems reasonable to seek

¹ The chief reason why theatricals are given at the village temples to-day is that they are public buildings with convenient stages. Not only religious but also secular plays are performed, sometimes vulgar and immoral ones. On the whole the moral standard of the Chinese

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for another possible origin of the drama in the early ancestor worship in which the deceased forefather of the family was impersonated by one of his descendants. A ceremony of honoring a revered ancestor could easily be expanded into a representation of his great deeds. It is also known that not only men but also gods were impersonated by the actors; as Mr. Wang puts it, they dressed in the attire of the gods and imitated their gestures. However, in regard to these representations of the gods our author feels that it is impossible to give any definite details. Yet in the verse of the time there are allusions to these performances referring to extravagance in dress and in articles of toilet, such as perfume; to a change in the style of music; to the employment of themes of love or of sadness in parting—all of which indicates the great popularity of these entertainments of singing or dancing. Hence our Chinese scholar believes that out of these beginnings the drama has grown.

In this connection it would seem proper to mention the work of the Cambridge University scholar, Professor William Ridgeway. He holds that Greek tragedy proper did not arise in the worship of the Thracian god Dionysus; but that it sprang out of the indigenous worship of the dead, especially dead

stage is very high and must be called a good influence for the largely illiterate population. The worship at Chinese temples in the course of the religious festivals has the general character of a carnival with money changers, booths for eating and drinking, acrobats, magicians, beggars, gambling devices, etc.

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chiefs who in some cases are later deified.¹ In dramatic dances in honor of ancestors or deceased heroes in Asiatic countries Professor Ridgeway finds support for his theory of the origin of the Greek theater. Speaking of the Chinese theater, he says that already in the time of Confucius certain solemn dances were held in the ancestral temples; at the present time in the temples of local deities, who were once heroes or heroines of the immediate neighborhood, dramatic performances are held in which these deified heroes are supposed to take an interest for the reason that they are themselves frequently the object of the worship; and that these modern theatricals seem to be descended directly from the ancient cult practiced five hundred years before Christ. It would seem from the foregoing that Mr. Wang's evidence gives support to Professor Ridgeway's theories of the origin of tragedy out of the worship of deified heroes.

Doctor Berthold Laufer, curator of the Field Museum, Chicago, has stated to me that in his opinion a discussion of the origin of the Chinese drama ought to differentiate between the beginnings of the "military plays" and the "civil plays." The latter are, as will be explained more fully in a later chapter, plays in our sense of the word, while the "military plays" consist of acrobatics that symbolize fighting. Doctor Laufer believes that these

¹ See Sir William Ridgeway, "The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races in Special Reference to the Origin of Greek Tragedy," Cambridge University Press, 1915.

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last-named take their origin from ancient ceremonies in which the use of weapons was the chief feature. Doctor Laufer has had considerable experience with the Chinese theater, and his museum is the only one in the world, so far as I know, which possesses life-size figures of Chinese actors in correct costume.

So much for ancestor worship as the source of the drama with the *wu* or *hsien*. Mr. Wang adduces records also of other types of actors. As early as 1818 B.C., according to a none too reliable Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-221 A.D.) record, a ruler is said to have abolished the temple rites and ceremonies and to have collected about his court clowns, dwarfs, and actors to perform amusing plays. In the more historic period of "Spring and Autumn" (770-544 B.C.) there are records of dwarfs in rôles similar to those of our court fools. They attempted to gain the favor of the rulers by their witty sayings which were often full of satire. Confucius in his capacity of prime minister saw himself forced to put to death one of these wits¹ because of his disrespectful allusions to the ruler—an action, incidentally, that seems most characteristic of the noble sage, who with all his virtues certainly was not endowed with a sense of humor. The function of these dancing, singing, play-acting dwarfs was not a re-

¹ Professor Porter calls my attention to the fact that Doctor Hu Shih calls these court jesters "sophists." They were the ones to make the shrewdest observations among all courtiers. The suggestion of the revolutionary element probably accounts for the death sentence.

ligious one; "they were to amuse men, not to amuse the gods."

In a review¹ of Mr. Wang's "History of the Drama under the Sung and Yuan Dynasties" Professor Soong calls attention to the following interesting analogies between Orient and Occident:

The influence of the court fools was considerable, and on the whole salutary in China. Shih Huang-ti (255-206 B.C.), the builder of the Great Wall, was so addicted to great building enterprises that the people suffered in consequence. It was Yu Sze, the court fool, who caused the emperor to treat the people with more consideration. The successor of this mighty ruler conceived the plan of having the Great Wall painted—perhaps just a caprice on his part, perhaps in order to render the Wall less subject to the influence of the weather. Again Yu Sze dissuaded the emperor from carrying out such a costly and wasteful project. The history of Yu Meng is even more interesting. In the kingdom of Chou the family of Suen Lo Ngao had become extremely impoverished because the king had forgotten the merits of the chief of the house, a famous general. Yu Meng, the court fool, donned the armor of the defunct military leader and sang of his exploits before the royal palace; now the king could no longer refuse to recognize and recompense the merits of the family. This touching episode told by the historian in the "Biography of Court Fools" cannot but recall Will Sommer to whom "The King would ever grant what he would crave."

During the Han Dynasty records show the existence of jugglers, magicians, rope-walkers, sword-

¹ *La Revue de Genève*, January, 1921.

EARLY HISTORY

swallowers, and also of plays in which masked actors disguised as gods, fearful leopards, cruel tigers, white bears, and gray dragons had their parts. Dwarfs and giants were made to play together in humorous pieces. Singing girls in costumes of feathers executed artful dances. Some of these performances are said to have been so indecent that passers-by covered their eyes. However, such performances were sharply censored at the time, just as they would be in present-day China.

All of these performances were very much favored by the rulers, but they consisted mostly of singing and dancing, while there was very little that might be called drama. In the northern Ch'i Dynasty (550-570 A.D.) however, there arose what might be called a historical play based on an episode in the life of a heroic warrior, Duke Lan Lu. This warrior had a somewhat effeminate aspect, and therefore he wore a mask in battle to inspire fear in the hearts of his enemies. His story was dramatized and became a very popular play, probably similar to the present-day "military plays" in which the play with swords and spears forms the *pièce de resistance*. There is a record about the same time of a comedy also based on an actual occurrence, called "The Drunkard." A certain man, Su Pao-pi (a name alluding to red spots on his nose) was a very heavy drinker and after each spree would beat his wife in the village street until she wept pitifully.

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Two actors, one dressed as a woman and the other as a man, would amuse the people by a popular farce portraying this quarrel between husband and wife. The playlet must have been one of extraordinary vitality, for there are records of it in the Chi, Chou, and Sui dynasties—to be sure, three short dynasties that followed one closely upon the other. Music and dancing also played a part in these two early dramatic presentations, so that they were probably of the melodramatic (in the etymological sense of the term) variety, such as is most of the Chinese drama of to-day.

The dramas in China are classified according to the style of music they employ. Another play of the same, or perhaps a little earlier period, called "The Tiger," is thought by Mr. Wang, because of the music of foreign tribes employed in it, to have been brought into China from "The Western Regions" (central Asia).¹ It is the story of a man who was killed by a tiger and whose son then set out on a search for the wild beast, fought with it and avenged his father by killing it in turn. Mr. Wang even hazards the suggestion that the two plays mentioned above, "The Mask" and "The Drunkard," were in their music and manner of presentation imitations of "The Tiger," in which case this form of drama

¹ Note by Professor Porter: Mr. Wang develops his argument very well, using evidence from the odd foreign names of countries, localities and places. At the period it is known that there was extensive intercourse between Western countries and China along the northern and southern caravan routes.

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would be a borrowing from a foreign country and not indigenous to China.

Two other early plays which Mr. Wang mentions deal with historical episodes. From the Han dynasty (206 B.C.—221 A.D.) dates the story of an unjust mandarin who had “squeezed” as they say in China, ten thousand rolls of silk and was put in jail. Later on the emperor moderated this punishment, because of the mandarin’s great learning, into the following: the culprit had to appear at court dressed in a white robe while for the period of one year the court fools were at liberty to make sport of him. This became the basis of a play shown by a number of records to have been acted frequently before the T’ang Dynasty. The plot seems, indeed, to have been a comedy made to order for the court fools to display their wit. There is evidence to show that this play was enacted in the imperial palace in the middle of the eighth century. A group of actors from Chekiang in presenting this play were said to have had voices so loud that they penetrated to the clouds—a circumstance that would win the favor of the devotees of certain types of modern Chinese drama. The other historical play has for a hero Fan Kuai, a noble who saved the emperor’s life by his prompt action against rebels. It is said to have been written by the T’ang Dynasty emperor, Chao Tsung himself, and to have been acted in the imperial palace in Ch’ang An.

It was during the T’ang Dynasty especially that

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a nonmusical type of drama flourished in the form of extemporized comedies. The plots hinged on local occurrences and differed with practically each presentation. However, much as in the Italian *commedia dell' arte*, with its Arlecchino, Pantalone, Dottore, Scapino, etc., certain characters or character types seem to have arisen. The very same extortionate mandarin, mentioned above as the central figure of a play, became such a type who figured in almost all of these comedies—in fact he is a stock character on the Chinese stage even to-day—while opposite him there appeared as his regular companion a fool wearing a green cap. Thus dialogue between two actors—in other words rudimentary drama—became firmly established. Since the satirizing of current events and of local characters was the avowed purpose of these comedies, it will be readily understood by all familiar with life in the East that the dishonest official came in for his fair share.

A topical comedy with a purpose from the Sung Dynasty (960–1126 A.D.) played before the emperor attained all that might have been desired. Through the efforts of an unpopular official a system of coinage had been introduced in which the smallest coin had a value of ten cash. Naturally enough this caused great inconvenience to very many poor people. Therefore some actors called upon to play before the emperor in the course of a feast proceeded to give him a lesson in rudimentary economics. A

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vendor of syrups appeared and shortly afterwards a thirsty customer. The latter paid one coin and demanded one drink. The merchant explained that he had no change for the coin and asked his patron therefore to take a number of drinks. The buyer does his best, but after the fifth or sixth cup taps his bulging stomach and exclaims, "Well, I've done it at last. But if the gentlemen in the government were to make us use hundred-cash coins I should surely burst!" The emperor was moved to gay laughter and smaller coins were at once issued. However, the efforts of these actors were not always so fortunate in outcome. The story is told, for example, of actors who had dressed up to represent Confucius, Mencius, and other sages for the purpose of giving the emperor some very pertinent advice on the division of land in the very words of the great moral teachers. The advice proved to be so inconvenient that the emperor had the actors whipped for their pains.

From the Sung Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.) Mr. Wang reports the names of 280 plays and from the Chin Dynasty (1115-1234 A.D.) 690 plays, but fails to state how many are extant. Of the so-called Ancient Drama it is known that a certain kind of free metrical form adapted to music (*ch'ü*) was employed; that as a rule only two actors appeared in each play; and that theatricals, though still very primitive, were quite popular, as they were presented both to the general public in shabby mat-

sheds and to the court at magnificent feasts. Our knowledge of the Ancient Drama is very meager to be sure, yet the work of Mr. Wang has made it possible to go beyond what Mr. Giles says in his "History of Chinese Literature"¹ after having mentioned the Pear Garden myth: "Nothing, however, which can be truly identified with the actor's art seems to have been known until the thirteenth century, when suddenly the Drama, as seen in the modern Chinese stage play, sprang into being." Owing to the great interest in Western drama in China at the present time it is very likely that other Chinese scholars will make researches in this interesting field and that more light will soon be shed on the origin of the Chinese drama.

¹ Page 257.



CHAPTER TWO

FORMAL DEVELOPMENT—YUAN DYNASTY, 1206-1368

HE rise of the Chinese drama was due to a national disaster that broke the sway of the ruling literary class. In 1264 Kublai Khan with his Mongols fixed his capital at Peking and for the first time in their history the sons of Han passed under the rule of an alien sovereign. The barbarians naturally enough abolished the literary examinations for government posts, consisting of competitions in the writing of essays and poetry in the language of the classics, for they did not care to appoint as viceroys and justices members of the subject race. The Mongol language had absolutely no literature and, indeed, not even an alphabet until 1279, when a Tibetan priest constructed one by imperial order. Chinese scholars were thrust out of their high offices and could find employment only as writers of petitions or as lowly clerks. There was no longer any call for the exercise of their talents in

the writing of descriptive essays or lyrical poetry such as had been demanded in the examinations formerly leading to the highest offices; they found, however, a fruitful outlet for their literary powers in a genre previously greatly despised by the literati — the drama.

The cause of the scholar's disdain for the drama and the novel was the great chasm that yawned between the classical language and the spoken language of the day in which, perforce, popular literature of entertainment or of the stage had to be written. For over a thousand years the literary language had been a dead language, so dead that a learned scholar could comprehend it only if he saw the text in black and white before his eyes — to hear it read did not by any means enable him to understand it. Everything that had been considered literature up to that time was composed in this language, and anything composed in the vulgar tongue was considered beneath the dignity of a scholar. Now, however, clever writers turned to the drama and the novel with the result that the written language was to a certain extent democratized in the works that appealed to the broad masses of readers or hearers. But let it be noted, *to a certain extent only*; for, as vanquished Greece in turn conquered Rome by her superior culture, so Chinese culture conquered the Mongols. After having been abolished for practically eighty years the literary examinations were reinstated and the drama too

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was gradually caught in pedantic fetters of formalism. Yet in spite of the fact that the Yuan dramatists moved away from the spoken language to one presupposing considerable erudition on the part of the reader, there are many scholars even to-day who regard the novel and drama as beneath their notice, just as a medieval scholar would have despised any work not written in Latin.¹

In fact these works have been recognized at their true worth only as late as 1917, when Hu Shih, Columbia University doctor of philosophy and professor at the National University in Peking, began to lecture on the Chinese drama as drama and to publish the best of the novels with historical intro-

¹ The difficulty in acquiring a reading knowledge of the classical Chinese (Wen Li) does not consist chiefly in learning to read five thousand or more ideograms—that is only a minor trouble—but in the retention in the memory of the texts of the classics to which constant allusion is made in a manner to confuse utterly the uninitiated. “The dragon has gone down to the sea” means “the emperor has died.” Or to translate the idea into English; the Bible says, “The words of the wise are as goads” (Ecclesiastes xii, 11) and Shakespeare (Hamlet V, 1). “There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners”; therefore the reader would have to know that “goads” stands for the words of the wise and “ancient gentlemen” for gardeners. But connoisseurs regard this classical language as the greatest monument of China, far finer than Sung pottery or the Temple of Heaven. Said a friend to me one day, picking up a copy of Omar at the verse:

O Thou, who man of baser earth didst make,
And didst with Paradise devise the snake,
For all the sin wherewith the face of man
Is blackened, man's forgiveness give and take.

“Such is this wonderfully rich, poetic Wen Li, while in Pai Hua (the vernacular) this same thought would cover pages of dull, colorless prose.” Of course, the spoken language is still as poor a vehicle for poetic thought as Italian was before Dante, but its advocates hope for its growth and development.

ductions. Professor Hu Shih finds in the language of these works a compromise which he hopes will be an aid in inducing the Chinese of to-day finally to adopt the vernacular as the language of science and belles-lettres. For, in spite of the concessions made to the firmly rooted conventions of the conservative class of scholars for the sake of lending dignity to their works and securing the approval of the literati, the novel and the drama, owing to their popular appeal, deviated largely from the dead language and approached the vernacular of the day.

The dramatists are as a rule men who are not otherwise famous as writers. Biographical material concerning the authors of the "One Hundred Yuan Dramas", the collection of plays considered classical in China, is so meager that it does not seem worth while to mention names about whose bearers little more can be said than that they "flourished." About five hundred plays were extant at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, while to-day there exist but one hundred and sixteen. Modern Celestial scholars are proud of the fact that an overwhelming percentage of the authors were real Chinese, practically all from the territory now covered by the provinces of Chihli, Shantung and Shansi, about a third of them born in Peking (called Yenching at the time). Nine tenths of the authors lived in what is called the first period of the Yuan drama (1235-1280) with its center in Peking; while the much smaller Southern School developed later

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(1280-1335) around Hangchow. Most of the authors were from among the common people, and only one among the whole ninety odd was a Tartar. Chinese critics regard Kuan Han-ching (the author of "The Sufferings of Tou-E", a play discussed below) as the greatest of all these writers, because his manner is true and natural. Others are spoken of as having a style that is lofty and magnificent, or pure and beautiful, or biting and vigorous.

The historian of the Chinese drama, Mr. Wang Kuo-wei, quoted above, states that the Yuan drama is a natural growth out of the previously existing forms and the traditional plots. More than thirty Yuan plots, he points out, had been used before in plays of the Sung Dynasty. He finds the chief advance of the Yuan drama to consist in the employment of more flexible verse forms for the poetic sections and the use of more dialogue in the place of narration and description. Thus the essence of drama, action, takes the place of narration. Moreover, the drama rose to the dignity of an art. Previous to this the plays, generally dialogues by clowns, had been mostly interlarded in entertainments of acrobatics, dancing, and music. Such performances took place frequently at the royal court and are described also in the writings of the Italian Ma-Ke-Po-Lo (Marco Polo) when he tells about the feast of the Grand Khan: "When the repast is finished, and the tables have been removed, persons of various descriptions enter the hall and amongst these a troop

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of comedians and performers on various instruments, as also tumblers and jugglers, who exhibit their skill in the presence of the Grand Khan to the high amusement and gratification of all the spectators."¹

As has been stated above, the dramas soon took on certain formal aspects. In general they have four acts, with a prologue, epilogue, or interlude, which makes them in appearance and length quite similar to our five-act plays. Some plays—analagous to our trilogies—have acts of a number that is a multiple of four and each group of four acts forms a unity by itself. For example, "The Western Chamber", has twenty acts and forms really five plays. According to Chinese critics the drama is composed of three elements: (1) action; (2) speech; (3) singing. Speech may be divided into monologue and dialogue; the purpose of the latter is to advance the action and of the former to arouse emotions—a function that very properly invites comparison with the rôle of the chorus in the Greek drama. No longer are there only two characters in these plays, but we now find four chief rôles along with various minor parts. In very rigid manner only one character is made to sing in each act, which means that each of the four characters has one act in which he or she plays the main rôle. This arrangement has had its peculiar effect which can be

¹ "Travels of Marco Polo", Everyman Edition, Dutton and Company, page 186.

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witnessed in present-day Peking, where plays of this type are staged, inasmuch as a famous actor who plays, let us say, the rôle of the lover, will not present entire dramas, but only such of the acts as give him the principal part. In the new plays of to-day, of course, a different practice is followed but the old repertoire of the average Chinese theater is so well known that it makes very little difference whether a drama is presented as a whole or in part. The character types of the Yuan drama, the *Mei* (male) and *Tan* (female), with their many variations, are in general quite similar to the types of present-day drama, a discussion of which is given in a later chapter. In the printed texts of the play characters are designated not by their names, but by the rôles which they play.

The classical drama of China offers many interesting parallels to different stages in the development of our drama, though it nowhere equals the plays of our great masters. Its greatest height reaches the level of perhaps the pre-Shakespearean drama in content, construction, and manner of presentation. The presentation of Chinese plays with the projecting platform stage, the lack of scenery and the emphasis on gorgeous costume, the playing of female parts by male actors, the extemporizing of clowns, and the use of music in "flourish" and "alarums" offers a strikingly close parallel to Elizabethan staging. But that is a chapter by itself.

In the consideration of Chinese drama a few facts

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of Chinese life must be borne in mind. The beau ideal in the Middle Kingdom is not the warrior, but the scholar. There is no hereditary aristocracy, but wealth and power falls to him who distinguishes himself in the competitive examinations and thus becomes viceroy of a province or some other type of high official. The passing of the examination therefore serves as the *deus ex machina* in many plays, solving all knotty problems accumulated by the fifth act. Marriages are arranged by the parents, and the romance of courtship is a rare and forbidden fruit. The religious and ethical background consists chiefly of a respect for the minute moral precepts of Confucius, with some Buddhistic notions of reincarnation and some Taoist superstitions impartially admixed.

To examine a few of the acknowledged masterpieces of the Yuan drama is to invite fascinating comparisons. In "Chao Mei Hsiang" (Intrigue of a Lady's Maid) we have a young servant girl uniting two lovers, a sort of Dorine of Molière's "Tartuffe" in a Chinese setting. The destiny of the young man and the girl have been settled beforehand by their parents, much as Orgon in "Tartuffe" disposes of his daughter's future:

*Enfin, ma fille, il faut payer d'obeissance,
Et montrer pour mon choix entière déférence.*

The lovers in both plays revolt against parental authority, and in both cases a happy ending is

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brought about indirectly through fortunate intervention on the part of the monarch himself. The meat contained in the Chinese play is about what "Tartuffe" would be with Tartuffe left out.

Two generals arrange, shortly before they die in battle, that their children are to marry. The son of the one, therefore, while on his journey to the capital to take his examination, visits at the home of the widow of his father's friend. The widow invites him to take up his abode in a pleasant pavilion in the garden, but she meets with icy silence every reference on the part of the young man to marriage. This is because she wishes to observe the very strictest code of conduct, which ordains that when a girl has lost her father she dare not marry until three years afterward. The young people fall in love at first sight; the young man so desperately that the yearning for the girl he is not permitted to see after their first accidental meeting causes him to become violently ill. The quick-witted, impertinent maid sent to look after the wants of the patient carries messages between him and the young girl and finally arranges a meeting on a moonlit night. The lovers have exchanged but a few words when the mother discovers them. She punishes the maid and sends the young man away in disgrace. He goes to the capital and passes such a brilliant examination that he attracts the attention of the emperor. The latter becomes interested in the young man's future and decides to carry out the wish of

his two faithful generals. The marriage is arranged by imperial command. Both lovers are in ignorance as to who their selected mates are to be, and at first are very much dejected; but when they meet as bride and groom their happiness is all the greater when they realize that the choice of their elders is also the choice of their hearts.

The play moves in an atmosphere of strictly prescribed etiquette of which the mother is a stony-eyed incarnation. The facetious little maid is a breaker of rules in the interest of more human considerations, and, like the servant in all our comedies from the time of Menander downward, she tells her mistress some frank home-truths. Not only is the young man a scholar, but the heroine with her maid-companion also have been ardent students of the classics. Quotations from Confucius, Mencius, Laotze, and the Buddhist writings lend their sparkle to the dialogue. The lovers exchange poems exhibiting that charming impressionism of delicately sketched moonlight on the lotus or snowfall on pine trees so characteristic of Chinese verse. Allusions to myths abound; for example, to the moonlit cloud that wooed the mother of Huang Ti as Jupiter did Io. As in the plays of Bernard Shaw and of his predecessor Shakespeare, the heroine takes the initiative by tossing into the room of the rather passive hero a bag embroidered with characters revealing her love. A wistful note is sounded by the young scholar when the wedding commanded by the em-

張海棠屈下開封府

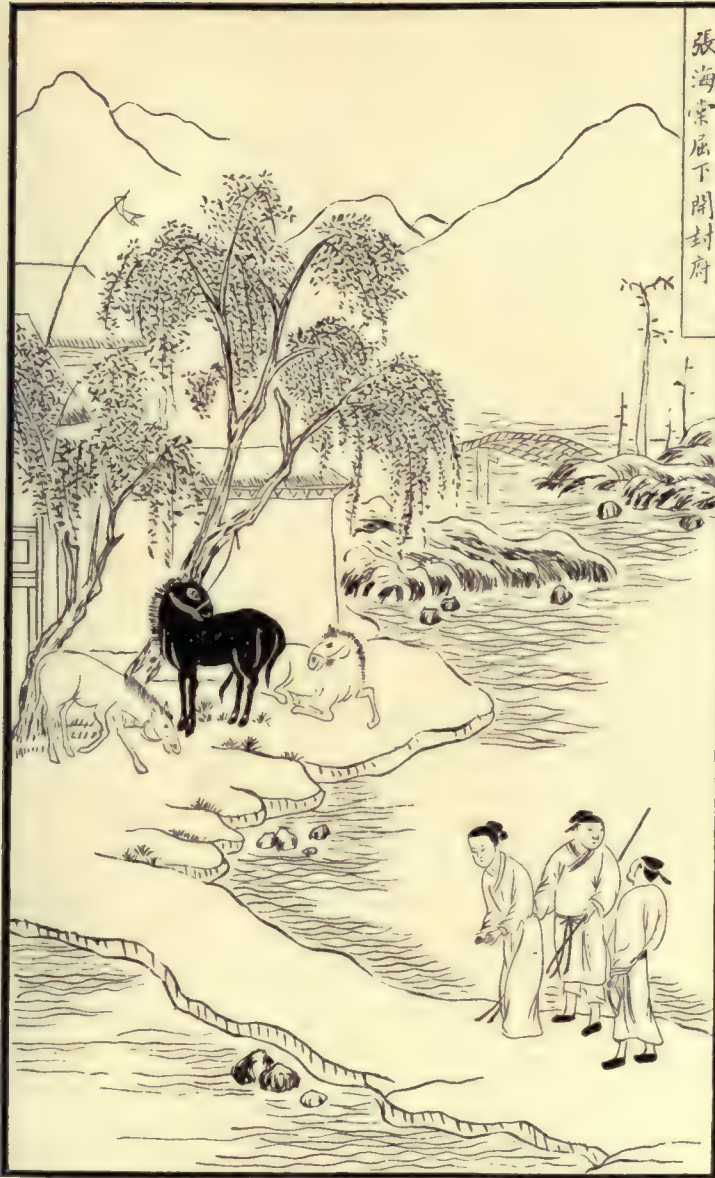


ILLUSTRATION BY A CHINESE ARTIST FOR "THE
CHALK CIRCLE"

This, together with three similar illustrations, has been taken from the
standard edition of the Yuan Dynasty classics

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peror is, as he believes, about to unite him to a woman other than the one he loves: "Musicians, please do not now play the air of the teals meeting in chaste pleasure who lament and yet feel no sorrow." This speech gives the same blending of the emotions so often spoken of by our poets in analyzing the mystery of love, perhaps most strikingly in Goethe's lines:

*Freudvoll und leidvoll,
Gedankenvoll sein,
Langen und bangen
In schwebender Pein,
Himmelhoch jauchzend,
Zum Tode betrübt,
Glücklich allein ist
Die Seele die liebt.*

The play "Ho Lang Tan" (The Singing Girl) portrays the punishment of vice and the triumph of virtue. A rich merchant decides to take into his house a second wife, a certain singing girl. He finds himself desperately in love with this lady of easy virtue, while the girl herself is planning to get his money in order to run off with her real lover. There is a scene between husband and wife in which the latter bitterly resents the plan of bringing a concubine into the house and pronounces grave warnings of the evils that will befall her husband in consequence. But the merchant persists in his plan and brings the singing girl to salute his wife as mistress of the house. The former is required by etiquette

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to make four bows, of which the last two must be returned by the wife. The wife refuses to greet the interloper, and after a short but violent quarrel she dies of anger. The next scene shows the singing girl stealing the merchant's money and setting his house on fire. Her lover, disguised as a boatman, throws the husband into a stream and tries to strangle the latter's son and his nurse. But passers-by prevent the cowardly murder, and one of the strangers buys from the nurse the seven-year-old boy for one ounce of silver. The poor nurse faces starvation and decides to adopt the profession of a singing girl. While traveling about in this capacity she meets the merchant who has had a miraculous escape from drowning and has sunk to the position of swineherd in a far country. His lowly state eloquently points the moral. At first he upbraids the nurse for having adopted her dishonorable calling, but afterward he accepts her invitation to quit his miserable post and to be supported by her. Thirteen years have passed and the young son has become a famous judge by virtue of having passed a brilliant examination. He happens to arrive in the same city where his relatives are and calls on the keeper of his inn to provide some singers for his entertainment. The host leads in his childhood nurse and his father. The young judge wipes his teacup with a piece of paper which he throws on the floor. As this paper happens to be the contract of his sale by the nurse to the kind-hearted stranger

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who later made him his heir and as it happens to be picked up by the father, a recognition is effected. At the same time two thieves are brought before the judge, who turn out to be the erstwhile second wife and her scoundrel lover. They meet their just punishment; the judge puts them to death with his own hand as a pious offering to the spirit of his deceased mother. The father praises the justice of Heaven and asks his son to order a feast that they may celebrate in due form this remarkable meeting.

The chief interest of this clumsy play lies in the light it throws on Chinese life. The indignation and subsequent death of the wife show how even in countries where "they are used to it" women resent bitterly the advent of a concubine into the house. During my stay in Peking there occurred several weddings that were marred by violent quarrels between the first wife and the new bride. The husband in our play vainly exhorts his wife to be good, to observe the three obediences and the four virtues of a wife.¹

Yet he cannot exile her, because she has borne him a son. All of the characters are drawn with great realism in their ignoble conduct. The sale of the child by the nurse is followed by a tearful monologue on the part of the sailor who had come to the

¹ The Chinese woman must as a child obey her father, as a wife her husband, and as a widow her son. The four wifely virtues are: (1) to honor and serve her mother-in-law; (2) to respect her husband; (3) to live in peace with her sisters-in-law; and (4) to have pity on the poor.

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rescue: "Poor child, your lot is to be pitied. This woman who was just about to be strangled by the brigands finds herself reduced to the necessity of selling her child. Could one find a sadder and more heart-rending situation? Who would not shed tears of pity for her?"

The author sets out with a realistic portrayal of a phase of life, but he yields to the force of convention which required a moral and happy ending—an influence not unknown in the drama of Western countries.

Our plays, from "The Merchant of Venice" to "Madam X", abound in court scenes, but the Chinese theater makes use of this effective device even more frequently. A play called "The Chalk Circle" presents in a trial scene a story almost identical with a Biblical one. Two women appearing before a judge with a child each claim it as their own. The judge orders the child placed in a circle drawn on the floor, while the women are to decide who is the mother by pulling at the child in a sort of tug-of-war. One woman refuses to hurt the child by pulling at his arm, and the judge decides with Solomonic wisdom that she must be the true mother. Very frequently these plays are satirical in character, making sport of the notoriously corrupt judges. In one of the naively primitive speeches of introduction, required by the theatrical convention of every character on entering the stage, a judge is made to say, "I am the governor of Ching-Chou. My name is Sou

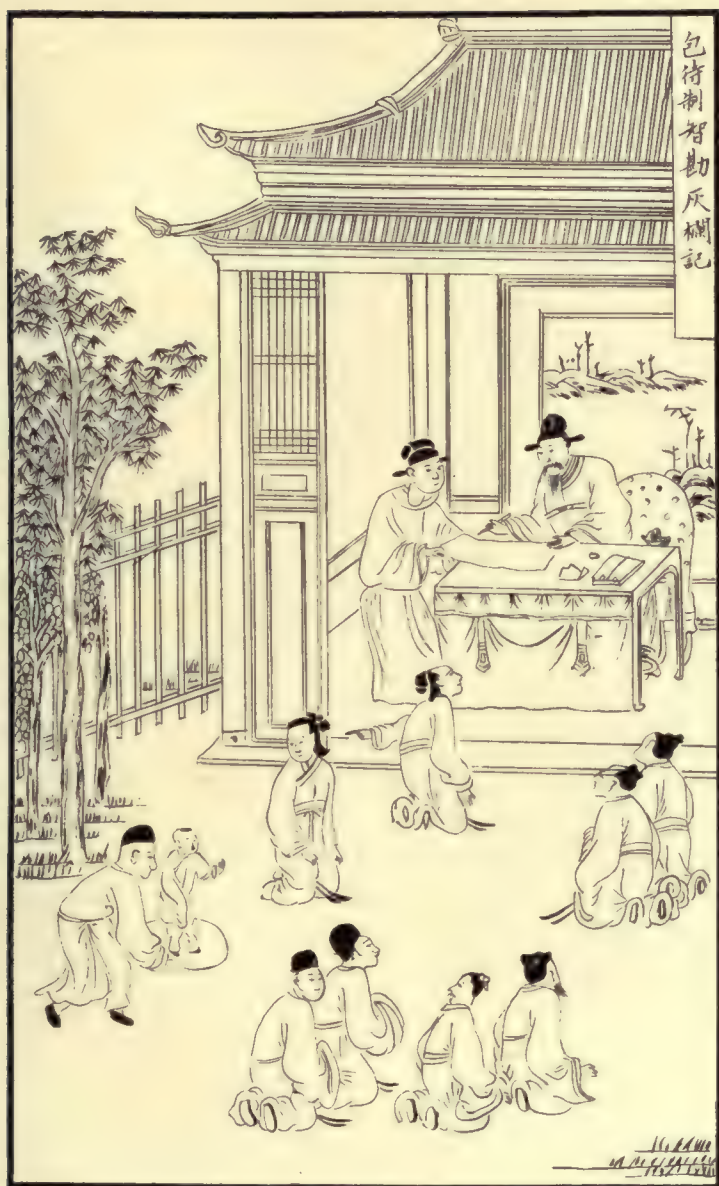


ILLUSTRATION BY A CHINESE ARTIST FOR "THE
CHALK CIRCLE"

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Shen. Although I fulfill the functions of a judge, yet I do not know a single article of the code. I like only one thing and that is money. By means of the bright metal every plaintiff can always make sure the winning of his suit."

"The Transmigration of You Hsin" is a play dealing with the popular superstitions regarding the reincarnation of souls in much the same spirit in which Voltaire in "Candide" treats the belief that this is the best of all possible worlds. As in Gogol's "Revizor" the government sends an inspector to a certain village where the officials of the law court are said to be corrupt. The rumor of the coming inspection reaches town before the inspector; and most of the judges flee. Only You Hsin remains, together with the clerks and minor officials. One of these expresses his surprise at the fact that You Hsin is going to meet the inspector so calmly, especially since he had recently accepted a scandalously large bribe. You Hsin answers, "Yes, to be sure, I've accepted presents. But my friend, you certainly are simple! Isn't it necessary that we fulfill our destiny? No one can die before his time has come. Have the courts ever prolonged by one minute the life of a man? If it were otherwise people would no longer believe in lucky and unlucky fates; they would no longer call Heaven and Earth the arbiters of life and death." A famous anchorite appears prophesying that You Hsin will die within two hours. Then the inspector enters the village and

begins immediately his examination of the court records. However, since he is an extremely stupid and incapable man, the clerks succeed in persuading him that everything is in order. But You Hsin in his home has fallen ill. He implores his beautiful wife never to show her face in public and to remain a widow forever. He dies at the very hour the holy man had foretold—even though his death is not due to a sentence imposed on him because of his corrupt practices.

You Hsin's soul appears before the judge of the lower world. As he had been very avaricious in life his punishment is to consist in having to gather coppers tossed into a deep kettle of boiling oil. But the holy man appears and obtains forgiveness for You Hsin, because he allows himself to be quickly converted to Taoism and makes the vows of poverty and chastity. The judge will even grant him the boon of a speedy return to earth. He cannot reënter his own body, because his wife has been a bit precipitate in cremating it; but he is allowed to enter that of a butcher who has just died, a blue-eyed, lame, and otherwise ugly man. The butcher's parents, wife, and neighbors are engaged in mourning, when the dead man suddenly rises from his coffin. You Hsin wants, first of all, to see his pretty wife, but when he tries to walk he stumbles with his lame leg. As they hand him the crutch he reflects, "Ah, yes, in my former life I had a crooked conscience and in this life I have a crooked and useless leg. I

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realize only too well the heavenly justice!" The butcher's relatives follow him to his former home, where his wife had been happy to receive him after he had fully explained his miraculous return. A violent quarrel breaks out between the two women, each of whom claims her husband. The case is taken before the stupid imperial inspector, who is in great perplexity before the question as to whether the body or the soul constitutes the husband. The case and the play end when the anchorite arrives to remind You Hsin of his vows and to take him into the unworldly wilderness.

Plautus' and Molière's subject for a comedy of character, the miser, has been employed by a Chinese playwright with strong local color to his humor. One of the many scenes of his play describes how the miser comes to feel that he must have a son to pray at his grave and therefore decides to buy one from an unlucky scholar reduced by poverty to selling his children. He offers the parents one ounce of silver. The mother exclaims in her disappointment, "Why, for that sum you could n't buy a boy modeled in clay." Perhaps this is a bit unmotherly in sentiment, but the retort is truly miserly, "Yes, but a boy of clay does not eat or cause other expenses." When this sum is refused the miser instructs his servant to go once more to the man, to hold the silver high, very high, above his head and to say, "There, you poor scholar, His Excellency Lord Kou deigns to give you one precious ounce of

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silver." His servant replies that no matter how high he holds it an ounce will be only an ounce; and finally he pays the father more out of his own wages!

When the son has reached the age of twenty the miser scolds him one day because he seems to think that money is for the purpose of buying food and clothes! By way of instruction he tells how one can live economically:

"One day I felt inclined to eat roast duck and therefore I went to the market to that shop which you know. They were just roasting a fine duck and the delicious juice was running down. Under the pretext of bargaining I handled it and soaked my fingers thoroughly in the gravy. Then I went home without having bought it and called for a plate of boiled rice. With each spoonful of rice I sucked one finger. At the fourth spoonful I became tired and fell asleep. During my nap a treacherous dog came and licked my last finger. When on awakening I noticed this theft, I became so angry that I have been ill ever since."

The house is in need of a picture of the god of luck, and the miser instructs his son to order the artist to paint a rear view, because to paint the face costs most. When he is about to die he orders his son to bury him not in a coffin of pine, nor even of willow wood, but to use the old watering trough standing in the back yard. The son objects that it is too short, but the father instructs him to chop

his body in two to make it fit. "And there is one more important thing I wish to say to you before I die; don't use my good ax to cut me in two, but borrow one from the neighbor."

"Since we have an ax, why should I bother the neighbor?"

"Perhaps you don't know that my bones are extremely hard, and that if you'd use my good cutting edge you'd have to spend some coppers to get it resharpener."

The miser's last words are inaudible, but he persists in holding up two fingers. All the relatives assembled in the death chamber are very much puzzled and try to please him by doing this or that, but the dying man's discomfort increases. Finally his old servant enters and he understands. There are two candles burning where one might do; and after one of them has been extinguished the miser dies in peace.

Tragedy is not found in the Chinese drama. The plays abound in sad situations, but there is none that by its nobility or sublimity would deserve to be called tragic. The closest approach to it is found perhaps in "The Orphan of the Chao Family",¹ made familiar to Western readers by Voltaire; or in "The Sorrows of Han." This latter play, in the Chinese literally "Autumn in the House of Han", is full of poetical touches. North of the Great Wall there is the Tartar Khan who sees in the weakness

¹ See Bibliography.

of the Han emperor his opportunity for further conquest. This young emperor is addicted to a life of dissipation, and through his minister Mao he gathers beauties for his harem from the four corners of his realm. As a true Oriental, Mao demands a heavy bribe from the family of every girl whose portrait he submits to the emperor. But the family of the most beautiful girl of all is so poor as to be unable to pay a bribe, and therefore the minister causes the artist to distort the portrait. Naturally the emperor does not summon this lady into his presence. But one evening, when in a melancholy mood he walks in an unfrequented part of his palace grounds, he comes by chance upon this girl as she is singing to her lute. Her beauty enchants him. "The very lantern shines brighter in the presence of this maid," he exclaims, and falls violently in love with her. Of course, he orders the grasping minister to be beheaded; but the latter flees to the Tartar Khan to show him a truthful picture of the favorite and to incite him to war against China.

The Khan sends an ultimatum: "Either give me this beauty for a wife or I will make war on China." The emperor is aghast with fear of a Tartar invasion, but the princess is willing to be sacrificed. "In return for your bounties it is your handmaiden's duty to brave death for you," she says and adds that surpassing beauty has always been coupled with great sorrow, but that she will leave a name ever green in history. After a sad farewell she departs



ILLUSTRATION BY A CHINESE ARTIST. TOU-E BEFORE
THE JUDGE

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for the country of the Tartars and meets the Khan on the banks of the Amur. She drinks a last cup of wine to her lover: "Emperor of Han, this life is ended. I await thee in the next." With these words the princess casts herself into the swift current and drowns in spite of the Khan's valiant effort to save her. He erects for her a tomb on the bank of the river, which tradition says is green both summer and winter. Moved by her noble character, the Tartar decides to live in peace with China.

A play that is even to-day a favorite in Peking playhouses under the title of "Snow in June" was called by its Yuan dynasty author "The Sufferings of Tou-E." It is the record of the endless sufferings at the hands of a pitch-black, wicked world of an innocent girl and her final vindication through a triple miracle from Heaven. In her childhood she was sold by her own father into a family where she became the son's wife and the drudge of her mother-in-law. For thirteen years she was a dutiful wife and when her husband died she hoped to remain faithful to his memory, as every widow in China is expected to do. But two cowardly ruffians, father and son, force themselves into the house where she is living with her likewise widowed mother-in-law and demand that the women marry them, endowing them at the same time with all their worldly goods. The two women refuse to yield to these insolent demands. Then the younger intruder, or rather bandit, places some poison in a bowl of soup, in-

tending to murder the older woman, but his father drains the cup by mistake. Hereupon he tries once more to coerce the heroine into marriage by threatening to fasten the murder upon her. She feels quite secure in her innocence and dares him to bring the case to court, very certain in the belief that justice will prevail. But the wicked judge begins by having the accused tortured, and this so brutally that the girl is at last forced into a false confession merely to escape the unbearable pain. Upon this she is promptly condemned to death. As she is kneeling to be beheaded she announces that three things will prove her innocence; her blood will not fall on the ground but on a banner ten feet above her head; snow will fall although the season is summer; and there will be a drought of three years' duration. All of this comes true as it had been foretold, and the strange tale is noised abroad in the land. Finally, a just judge—her very father who as a poor scholar had been forced to sell his child!—hears of the case and decides to investigate it. The spirit of his daughter comes to enlighten him in regard to the true state of affairs, and the real murderer is punished by being nailed to a wooden ass and cut into a hundred and twenty pieces.

This obtrusively moral ending is a *sine qua non* in Chinese plays; likewise the crude plot as well as the rôle played by accident rather mar one's enjoyment of the play. Yet the courage of the girl in the face of her persecutors, her firm belief that justice



ILLUSTRATION BY A CHINESE ARTIST. TOU-E ABOUT TO BE BEHEADED

FORMAL DEVELOPMENT

will prevail in the end, and her stoical manner of meeting death are elements not without their charm. The scene of the execution is rather impressive in its simplicity.

Tou-E: (sings) Ye clouds that float in the air on my account, make dark the sky! Ye winds that sigh because of my fate, come down in storms! Oh, that Heaven would make my three predictions come true!

Mother-in-law: Rest assured that snow will fall for six months, and that a drought will afflict the country for three years.

Now, Tou-E, let your soul reveal clearly the great injustice which is about to cause your death.

(The executioner strikes off Tou-E's head).

The Judge (seized with terror): O Heavens! The snow is beginning to fall! This is surely a miracle!

Executioner: I behead criminals every day and their blood always flows on the ground, but the blood of Tou-E has spotted the two banners of white silk and not a drop has fallen on the ground. There is something supernatural about this catastrophe.

The Judge: This woman was truly innocent!

The plays discussed in this chapter are sufficient to show that in the thirteenth century the Chinese possessed a theater of fair merit. To be sure, the technique is extremely crude; characters on their first appearance on the stage tell the audience their names followed by a conscientious account of their past lives and the part to be played by them in the drama; the motivation of the actions is very poor; many plays seem to be dramatized narratives rather than real dramas; there is a great paucity of inven-

tion as shown by the rather frequent repetition of dramatic devices and motives; the necessity of having a moral ending leads to numerous absurdities; and chance rules the playwright's world from beginning to end, always in the interest of the good. Furthermore, there is lacking a real sense of the tragic; there are no sublime heroes overcome by the universal human limitations which they challenge, nor are there moral conflicts of an elevating nature in which poetic justice triumphs. The characters are in general types rather than individuals, and there is very little deep psychological insight displayed. And on the whole it must be said, the plays do not rise to a very high spiritual level. Yet there is great charm in this drama which brings on the stage characters of all sorts from emperors down to coolies, and displays in full the rich life in the Middle Kingdom of the days when Marco Polo described it.



CHAPTER THREE

THE MING DYNASTY—1368-1644

THE PI-PA-CHI

HE Yuan Dynasty of Mongol rulers was a very powerful one and extended the Chinese frontiers to include Korea, Yün-nan, Annam, and Burma. The rulers proved themselves very tolerant of Chinese religions and institutions; the emperor Jen Tsung even reestablished the Hanlin Academy and the official examinations. But though the government of these foreigners was fairly efficient yet it was by no means popular, and frequent rebellions occurred. Finally, the Chinese under the leadership of a former Buddhist monk, Chu Yuan-chang, drove the Mongols beyond the Great Wall and founded the Ming Dynasty. The ex-monk ascended the throne in 1368 and is known in history as Emperor Hung Wu.

The Ming Dynasty is known as a period of prosperity in which industry and commerce, as well as the arts of poetry and painting, flourished. It was also a great period for the drama. Over six hun-

dred Ming dramas are still extant or are at least known by title, and many of them were written by well-known authors of high literary standing and great scholarship. The drama was so much appreciated at this time that many high officials and wealthy families had private troupes of actors, a large number of the dramas being specially written for these troupes. Since the audiences were composed of the élite, the language of the dramas could be of a highly literary character.

A development took place at this time that altered considerably the form of the drama. Instead of the compact and unified three, four, or five-act plays of the Yuan period, playwrights began to produce dramas of thirty-two, forty, or even forty-eight acts. The name of this new form is *ch'an ch'i* (literally "novel") in distinction to the *tsa ch'i* of the Yuan Dynasty. Doctor Hu Shih, writing to me about these two forms, suggests that one might call the former "play" and the latter "drama." "Technically the new form seems to be a degradation," he says, "but aside from the aspect of literary economy the Ming dramas were superior to the Yuan plays in many respects, viz. (1) profounder conception, (2) far better characterization, (3) more even distribution of parts among the characters. In the Yuan plays only one character had a 'singing' part and the others were completely subordinated; while in Ming dramas the rôles are more evenly balanced. In many cases the same theme was treated by Yuan

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and Ming dramatists, and in most cases the Ming version is far better."

In this chapter I am presenting an example of this new variety of drama, a 24-act piece called "Pi-Pa-Chi" (The Story of a Lute). Except for the fact that dialogue and stage directions are used the work might well be called a novel. Aside from the technical interest of the drama it is most significant as a presentation of Confucian ideals, a revival of which was typical likewise of the Ming Dynasty. Such ideals are embodied in the family system with the selfishness—as it appears to us—of old age. After reading about the adventures of the hero, Tsai Yung, the Westerner can understand why in Confucian writings along with widows and orphans there are enumerated "son-less fathers." The conflict in the drama centers about the "higher" and the "lower" obedience—service to the state or to the family. But the problem is not a clear-cut one, as the son is to serve the state in the interest of the greater prosperity of his own family; nor can it be said that it is solved in any way. The drama, however, is full of Chinese moralizing along lines far removed from the thinking of the "practical" Westerner.

Indeed, much of the famous mystery of the East or the inscrutability of the Orientals might be less baffling to the average American if he were better acquainted with the literature of China. I have known, for example, a young Chinese politician who

was none too scrupulous in the manner in which he went about earning his living, who drank, supported a number of concubines, and in fact was what might be called by the vulgar a "rounder." In the course of a dinner one evening he told me between the sharks' fins and the Peking duck that he had been offered a post in Washington, but, lucrative though it was, he could not accept it because of "filial piety" — his very words. Now piety in any sense of the word was the last thing I associated with this youth, and therefore his statement seemed to me surprising. There was another Chinese, the owner of an excellent stable, with whom I went riding frequently in the Temple of Heaven. He was a vigorous young man, educated in Paris, very businesslike and progressive in all his ideas. One day I received an invitation to his wedding, and, on going, found a merry throng in the gaily decorated courtyard, with dancing in European fashion going on in full blast. I noted the groom among the dancers, congratulated him and remarked, "Well, I'm sure you're very happy to-day!" But he shook his head and, as tears came into his eyes, he told me that the bride was not of his choice but had been selected and forced on him by his elder brother, the head of the family. Again, in speaking one day with a progressive young student who talked a great deal about reforms in politics and who participated eagerly in parades and other demonstrations staged for that end, I mentioned a certain official who had flagrantly stolen

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funds collected for the famine sufferers. The student expressed perfunctory disapproval of the official's conduct, but added, "Still, if I were in his position, I'd probably do the same." Such is the manner in which the Chinese act and as such they show themselves in their literature.

"Pi Pa Chi" was written by an otherwise unknown author, Kao Tsi-ch'ing, about the end of the fourteenth century. The first performance of the play is known to have taken place in 1404, in the reign of Yung Loh, the ruler who, as every tourist knows, has the most prominent monument among the Tombs of the Ming Emperors north of Peking. The play is typically Chinese inasmuch as the hero is not a warrior or a prince, but a poor scholar who rises to fame through his knowledge of literature. It abounds in sad situations and is praised by Chinese critics because it makes the spectators or readers weep. Furthermore, it conforms to the demand made on all Chinese dramas by being strictly ethical in its tendency. The moral lesson inculcated is that of the chief virtue of the Chinese—veneration of parents. This is done with such devotion and force that the play might well be called the Song of Songs of Filial Piety.

The first scene introduces a young scholar, Tsai-yung, face to face with the alternatives of remaining in his village to take care of his aged parents or of going to the capital in search of honors and lucrative posts. His own wishes are to remain at home,

less for his parents' sake than because of the beautiful wife whom he has married but two months ago. But his father urges him to go to Ch'ang An, to use his talents, and to gain fame and wealth. "At fifteen one must study, at thirty a man must act." A friend of the family, an elderly gentleman called Chang, sides with the father against the mother, who wishes to keep her son at home. She tells the story of a young man who had left his family to take the examination at the capital, but who, when at last his learning had gained him a post as superintendent of an almshouse, found his parents as inmates in the very institution. The young wife takes no part in the discussion at all; in fact, the elderly gentlemen seem to consider affection for her an unmanly weakness on the son's part. "He thinks of nothing but love and the sweet pleasures of the nuptial couch," says his father. "Here it's two months that he is married, and yet one cannot tear him away from this place." This represents a very common attitude in China — I remember reading in a Peking paper in 1917 in an attack on the vice-president of Tsing Hua College that one of his faults was that he occasionally went walking with his wife! One of my students from Shansi told me one day that he had been married during the summer vacation. I asked whether his wife was with him in Peking, and when he answered in the negative, whether he was writing to her. "Oh, no," he said shamefacedly, "I would n't do such a thing."



A CHINESE ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF TWO PIOUS SOULS

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The father calls on the son to state what he understands by filial piety. The son answers by quoting the "Book of Rites," "It is the duty of the son to take every care that in summer as well as in winter his parents should enjoy all comforts of life. He must every evening himself arrange the bed on which they are to sleep; every morning at the first crowning of the cock he must inquire in affectionate terms about the state of their health; then, in the course of the day, he must ask repeatedly whether they are suffering from the cold or whether the heat incommodes them. The duty of the son is to watch over his parents wherever they go, to love those whom they love, honor those whom they honor; he must even love the horses and dogs whom his father loves." And he adds from the "Sayings of Confucius": "A son should not leave the home of his father and his mother so long as they are still living."

To this the father retorts with a quotation from "The Book of Filial Piety"; "The first degree of filial piety consists in serving one's parents; the second in serving one's prince, and the third in seeking after honors." The father persuades the son to go. His son will soon be a mandarin, he says, and then, "The three kinds of meat (beef, mutton and pork) and the rare foods which are offered up in the great sacrifices will be served to me three times a day in tripods of elegant form or in dishes of fine porcelain. That will be better than eating beans and drinking water."

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But the mother gives expression to her grief in a metaphor praised by Chinese commentators: "In a moment they will tear away the pearl I was holding in my hand." Forebodings of evil fill her heart. "Go then, my son, but if during your absence your father and mother should die of hunger and cold, your honor will not therefore be smirched when you return in an embroidered robe."

The second scene of the play transfers the action to Ch'ang An, the old capital. With the symmetry so characteristic of all Chinese art the action of the drama is divided almost equally between the scenes in Tsai-yung's native village, and those in the imperial city. We are introduced into the palace of an imperial minister, a certain Niu, and here through the words of a maidservant we learn of the dull, tedious, joyless life in the women's apartments. The author pictures the minister's daughter, Niu-hsi, as the model young woman who prefers working at embroidery to playing in the open air. The servant girl on the other hand is sad because spring (used symbolically for love) is passing her by. In a beautiful allegory on spring and its manifestations she gives expression to her feelings, while her mistress cites in reply the ancient Chinese rule of conduct: "Women must not leave the interior apartments." The scene seems to be a protest on the author's part against this cruel stunting of the lives of his countrywomen.

Into Minister Niu's house come two rival go-

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between who make offers of marriage for Niu's daughter in the interest of two fathers of distinguished sons. But Niu refuses; he will accept for his daughter none but the scholar who has won the very highest honors at the examinations. The two women begin to quarrel and are driven off with blows by Niu's orders, because by fighting in his house they offend against the rites. A marriage arranged by such wrangling old hags between young people who meet for the first time on the day of their wedding certainly does not offer much in the way of romance. An even more depressing picture of the life of the young girl one gains from the manner in which Niu takes his daughter to task for having walked in the garden. "Don't you know of what the principal merit of a young woman consists? I have told you before, men are looking for women who don't like to leave the women's apartments." Everywhere the ghost of Confucius giving precepts for the regulation of the private life down to the minutest details!

The play returns to Tsai-yung, who is now on the road to the capital in the company of three other candidates for the examination. Each in turn tells of the purpose of his studies. Tsai-yung outlines his principles as follows:

"Here is the method I have adopted. When I was seated I read, when I walked I recited from memory what I had learned. I have studied thoroughly ten thousand chapters; I have carried on

difficult studies and researches. But as there are two things in life that one must never lose sight of —loyalty to the prince and filial piety—I have always tried to show myself grateful for the emperor's benefits and to return with thankfulness the kindness of my parents." This speech is applauded by the other scholars and they in turn give their answers, some of which are of rather satirical turn, especially the one of the student who explains that with him the essential is correct pronunciation and beautiful penmanship!

The next scene presents a burlesque on the literary examinations. It recalls somewhat an entrance examination given in a "prep" school I once attended, where the older students, dressed up in frock coats and with false beards on their faces, took the part of faculty. The examination of freshmen consisted of the singing of hymns, the shining of shoes, and a guessing contest as to which of the "professors" had paddled them in the rear. The imperial examiner announces solemnly to the five hundred candidates that the present test would not be like last year's, when they had been asked to write essays, one on literature, another on morals, and a third on politics, but that he was going to ask them first, to compose a rhyme; second, to guess a riddle; and third, to sing a song. Needless to state, Tsai-yung passes with flying colors in this test full of humorous puns which are, of course, untranslatable. The examiner is made to say at the end, "Tsai-



A SCHOLAR
Chinese Character Type

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difficult studies and researches. But as there are two things in life that one must never lose sight of—loyalty to the prince and filial piety—I have always tried to make myself grateful for the emperor's benefits and to return with thankfulness the kindness of my parents." This speech is applauded by the other scholars and they in turn give their answers, some of which are of rather satirical turn, especially the one by the student who explains that with him the essential is correct pronunciation and beautiful penmanship.

The next scene presents a burlesque on the literary examinations. It recalls somewhat an entrance examination given in a "yung" school I once attended, where the older students, dressed up in frock coats and with false beards on their faces, took the part of faculty. The examination of candidates consisted of the singing of hymns, the sliding of shoes, and a guessing contest in which all the "professors" had paddled them by the nose. The imperial examiner announces solemnly to the five hundred candidates that the present test would not be like last year's, when they had been asked to write essays, one on literature, another on science, and a third on politics, but that he was going to ask them first, to compose a rhyme; second, to guess a riddle; and third, to sing a song. Needless to state, Tsai-yung passes with flying colors. His test full of humorous puns which are, of course, untranslatable. The examiner is made to say at the end, "Tsai-



ying, I recognize the superiority of your talents, your learning is indeed profound; you rise far above the others; your merit is most extraordinary. Immediately I am going to apprise the emperor of the outcome of the examinations!" This scene leads one to suspect that the author of the play had good reasons for venting his satire on the inane literary competitions—probably he had failed and was therefore forced to waste his talents in a life of retirement.

The real hero, or rather heroine, of the play now appears for the first time, namely Tsai-ying's young wife Wu-niang. No news has come from the capital as to her husband's success, a famine is ravishing the district, and the old parents of Tsai-ying are making one trip to the pawnshop after the other. But Wu-niang is determined to do her duty as daughter-in-law; she is going to show filial piety to the last in conformity with precepts such as the following, quoted from the "Book of Rewards and Punishments", a work which is not for sale in bookshops but is distributed in the temples to the pious: "A daughter-in-law must serve the father and mother of her husband as a daughter serves her father and mother. She must show filial piety and complete obedience. If she lacks in her duty toward them she lacks at the same time filial piety. This crime always becomes known to Heaven, as the following story illustrates. In the territory of Chang-chu there were three sisters-in-law entirely lacking

in filial piety. One day they heard a clap of thunder and at the same time they were changed: one into a cow, the second into a lamb, and the third into a dog; their heads alone preserved the original form. . . . Chin-ing, the governor of that district, had an engraving made showing the metamorphoses and had it distributed among the people to teach them a lesson. That is how Heaven punishes!"

Wu-niang's immediate duty is to try to make peace between her aged parents-in-law. Tsai's wife is not slow in telling her husband "I told you so" in regard to the evils that have followed their son's departure, while Tsai naturally enough does not become any calmer for being told what a fool he is. To appease their wrath and to supply a bit of food Wu-niang pawns the few hairpins and other ornaments that she possesses.

While his parents are slowly dying of hunger, Tsai-yung, by his brilliant record, has attracted the attention of the emperor himself. The latter orders that the daughter of Minister Niu, who has been refused to many a deserving suitor, should be given to him. Niu is overjoyed to receive as a son-in-law the candidate accorded the highest honors and immediately sends a go-between to arrange the affair. However, she returns to announce that Tsai-yung refuses, because he is married and has various obligations toward his parents. But the real reason, she whispers, is that the bride's feet are too long. Minister Niu flies into a rage; he says that no one

would any longer respect his position if he were to accept this refusal. He is going to speak to the emperor about it. Small wonder that under the circumstances Tsai-yung's petition to the emperor to be allowed to return home is refused; instead he is again ordered to marry Niu-hsi in a mandate beginning with the words, "If filial piety is the basis of all virtues, then the perfection of all morals consists in serving one's prince." With tears he leaves the imperial palace and must submit to being married against his wishes to a second wife. He regrets that he cannot return to his parents (does not seem to feel any regrets about Wu-niang) and breaks out into a lamentation: "High reputation is a tie that binds; good fortune is an iron chain. Fortune and reputation are the instruments used by Heaven to inflict tortures on mankind!"

The scene again shifts to the famine-stricken province. A mandarin finds that a corrupt official has stolen the little grain that is to be distributed to the poor. This commissioner is caught in the very act, yet in typical Chinese fashion he has a ready but translucent excuse to offer; however, when he is threatened with torture he is willing to confess that he is a robber. This wicked official is then made to sign a written confession of his guilt and is led off to jail. His kind appears in hundreds of plays; in fact, he is probably the very favorite type on the Chinese stage. The mandarin asks Wu-niang why she had come to the court herself instead of sending

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a male member of the family; a woman, he says, should not leave the inner apartments of the house. It is interesting to note that a Chinese commentator considers this an erroneous interpretation of the passage in the "Book of Rites"; it is only the young girl who is not to leave the inner apartments; once a woman is married she may do so. When the mandarin learns of Wu-niang's sad situation, he commands an attendant to give her three portions of the rice embezzled by the official. Another official, who seems to be hand in glove with the embezzler, follows Wu-niang and in a lonely place on the road demands that she return the rice, lest he kill her on the spot. Wu-niang offers him her clothes; if he will only not demand the food that is to save the lives of the old people. The black-hearted villain says that he wants the rice and does not care to expose her limbs to the fury of the elements. Then comes the young woman's touching answer, which reaches perhaps the highest level of a daughter's devotion: "What matters it if my body be exposed to the fury of the elements, so long as I can save the lives of my father-in-law and my mother-in-law!" The cowardly wretch pretends to be touched and bids her go her way in peace, but as soon as she is off her guard he snatches from the defenseless woman her bag of rice. Fearing the reproaches of her parents-in-law Wu-niang plans suicide, but the memory of her husband's admonition that she watch over his parents decides her to continue in the thankless task.

The next scenes show just how ungrateful her parents-in-law are for her unlimited devotion. Wu-niang herself is eating roots, buds, the bark of trees, and other things classified as material containing some slight food values in so-called "famine food books"—a type of literature enjoying a wide circulation in China. But her suspicious mother-in-law fears that the young woman is eating better food than she is serving to her, because Wu-niang eats her miserable stew in private. At one of her meals the author, by a strange realism, has her say, "When I have eaten this mess my hunger ceases, but then there begin pains in the intestines much more violent than the hunger had been." When the mother-in-law surprises her she finds that Wu-niang had been extremely self-sacrificing instead of selfish as she had supposed, and the shock is too much for her weakened body; she dies.

The husband too is very much enfeebled, and when the friend of the family, Chang, comes to call, he is mortified that he cannot rise to meet his guest. Throughout the play there is in the speeches of practically all the characters an urbanity and a politeness which show how deeply the lessons of Confucius to do or say always the fitting thing have gone over into the flesh and blood of his nationals. Wu-niang tells Chang of their greatest cause for anguish—they have not the means to give the deceased a proper burial. Chang then shows himself an ideal friend from the Chinese point of view by

saying, "I shall order a servant to prepare a wooden coffin in which we shall place the body of your wife. I myself shall then select a lucky day for the funeral, and after having had a grave dug on the hill in the south, I shall accompany the procession."

The scene that gives the title to the play is one in which Tsai-yung gives expression to his tenderest emotion by playing on the lute. This instrument is regarded by the Chinese as the noblest and æsthetically the highest musical instrument in existence. A Chinese lover of music cannot find words to express the delight the lute can provide.¹ As a general thing the Chinese are ashamed to display emotion, and the Westerner is often shocked by apparent callousness, as for example when a person who has just lost a dear relative gives vent to a nervous laugh instead of yielding to tears when the subject is alluded to. Therefore it is by means of the lute that Tsai-yung gives expression to his repressed feelings. He does this with the delicate touch employed by Chinese painters in their impressionistic pictures and by the poets in their suggestive verses in which, as some one has said, the i's are never dotted, but a definite

¹ The Chinese name for the instrument is *chin*. Chinese writers on music have set down seven conditions under which one should not play the instrument: when one has just heard the news of a death; when some one is playing the flute in the vicinity; when one is oppressed by business cares; when one has not purified his body; when one is not wearing the ceremonial cap and gown; when one has not lighted sweet-smelling incense; and when there is not present a friend who understands music. Chancellor Tsai Yuan-pei, until 1923 the head of the National University in Peking, was a believer in training in æsthetics, and considered a proper appreciation of the music of the *chin* a most desirable element in the *mental equipment* of a cultured man.

mood is nevertheless conveyed all the more forcefully.¹ While Tsai-yung touches the strings of his instrument one servant fans him with an ivory fan, and a second burns incense, and a third places his books before him. Under such ideal conditions the Chinese scholar is quietly singing to his lute.

At this point his newly wedded wife, Niu-hsi, enters. Evidently the relation between the two is still an extremely distant one, for his wife, in asking Tsai-yung to sing a ballad for her, remarks that every time she comes to listen to his music, he stops. She too has her grief which she would like to have dispelled by sweet music. Tsai-yung begins to play, "The pheasant in the morning begins his long flight", and "The wild duck separated from the companion he loves." But these songs do not suit Niu-hsi's mood. She wants not a song of a disappointed lover, but one to fit the present situation where husband and wife are together.

"My lord, in the calm of this lovely evening, in full view of this ravishingly beautiful scenery, sing

¹ Giles, "Chinese Literature", page 155. "A poet should not dot his i's. The Chinese reader likes to do that for himself, each according to his own fancy. Hence such a poem as the following, often quoted as a model in its own particular line:

"A tortoise I see
 on a lotus-flower resting:
 A bird mid the reeds
 and the rushes is nesting;
 A light skiff propelled
 by some boatman's fair daughter,
 Whose song dies away
 o'er the fast-flowing water."

me the ballad, 'When the storm wind moves the pine trees.'" Tsai-yung starts to play it, but alas! as Niu-hsi discovers, he gradually slips into the air, "When I think of returning to my native land."

Niu-hsi is disappointed because she cannot penetrate her husband's melancholy mood. He explains that he cannot play better because he has his old lute no longer. In answer to his wife's questions Tsai-yung speaks of his lute with evident symbolism, telling her that he has thrown his old lute aside but that at the bottom of his heart he loves it still. Niu-hsi guesses the cause of her husband's grief, but she cannot persuade him to confide it to her. The two drink wine together and recite verses, but when the hour becomes late Tsai-yung asks his wife to retire and calls for his servant. Before the latter appears Tsai-yung sings to notes of his lute about a dream in which Wu-niang had appeared to him; but, in the words of Heine, "Es war ein Traum."

He asks the servant to find him a trustworthy messenger whom he may send to his native village to inquire about his parents. But before this plan is put into operation an impostor appears, bringing an alleged letter from Tsai-yung's father, according to which all the family are enjoying the very best of health. The letter gives the young scholar great pleasure and earns its bearer a rich reward; Tsai-yung gives the impostor some pearls and some gold for his father in addition to a letter in which he states that he is detained at the capital, but that he hopes to

return home soon. Meanwhile, he very humbly begs forgiveness for the long delay. The false messenger is portrayed in a monologue as the most cowardly and the direst of villains. That it is so easy for him to deceive Tsai-yung is not so far-fetched as it may seem to the Westerner, for the employment of professional letter-writers is a very common practice in China where the percentage of illiteracy is high.

Of course, the father never receives his son's letter; on the contrary, the next scene shows him dying of hunger. His faithful daughter-in-law watches over him to the last. For three years Tsai-yung has been absent without so much as sending a letter; therefore the father asks his daughter-in-law to marry again as soon as he has died. Wu-niang replies with a Chinese proverb, "No one can serve two masters", and affirms her resolve to remain faithful to her husband. He is so grateful to her that he hopes, according to Buddhist beliefs, to be her daughter-in-law in his next life while she is to be his father-in-law. He curses the day he asked his son to leave home and gives to his friend Chang the injunction: "I leave you my cane. When this ungrateful and disobedient son of mine returns home, beat him for me with my stick and chase him out of the house." With these fatherly words he breathes his last.

In order to earn the money for her father-in-law's funeral Wu-niang cuts her hair and tries to

sell it in the street. Her bald head gives her the appearance of a nun, although she feels scarcely worthy of becoming one. In the anguish of her poverty she runs through the streets, imploring people not to bargain with a wretched woman in her position, but to help her by buying the very last thing of value she possesses. The faithful Chang meets her in the street, and, on learning her story, promises to send to her house enough money to enable her to bury her father-in-law properly according to the rites. She in return gives him her hair, asking him to sell it. He accepts it, but not in order to sell it; far from that, he is going to keep it until Tsai-yung's return, in order to prove to him the full extent of Wu-niang's filial piety. This piety is so great that when Wu-niang goes to the cemetery to erect a monument over the grave of the deceased, a genie, touched by her devotion, comes to her aid by calling the white monkey of the south and the black tiger of the north to help him erect this tomb with the well-known speed and skill that genii possess. He also advises Wu-niang through the medium of a dream to assume the garb of a nun and to search for her husband in the capital. Wu-niang decides to follow this advice. She plans to earn her subsistence by taking with her Tsai-yung's lute, in order to sing in the villages songs in praise of filial piety. In order to be able to accord the spirits of her parents-in-law their proper worship she paints their portraits and carries them with her. The

Octogenarian Chang totters with Wu-niang to the edge of the village and bids her godspeed on her long journey.

Meanwhile Tsai-yung has been acting all this time like a man in a stupor, his wife says. Niu-hsi is pictured as a kindly young woman watching over her husband with loving care. "What ails you?" she asks. "You have the finest delicacies served you. You eat boiled tongues of orang-outang and roasted leopard embryos. You wear robes of violet silk; your belt is a belt of jade. When you go out or when you return your horse crushes under foot all manner of flowers which people spread on your path. Your head is shaded by an umbrella with three layers of silk. Formerly you were only a poor scholar living in a thatched hut; now you fulfill the highest functions in the emperor's palace. You swim in wealth, but this wealth is not sufficient for you; you do nothing but wrinkle your forehead and heave sighs."

Niu-hsi asks many more questions, but her husband refuses to reveal the cause of his grief. But when she leaves the room Tsai-yung relieves his feelings in a monologue which she overhears. When he has finished lamenting his separation from his parents and his wife (the latter is always mentioned after father and mother), Niu-hsi comes in to say simply that she will travel with him to his native village, if that is what he is longing for. He retorts, with the timidity found in most scholar-heroes in

Chinese plays, that he is afraid to let her father hear of the matter and that he therefore forbids her to mention it. But the otherwise docile and obedient wife simply overrides his wishes and takes the matter to her father. The latter is quite willing to give his permission for the journey; only suggests that it might be better to send a faithful servant to bring Tsai-yung's parents and wife to the capital. This plan is agreed to by all except the servant who, in a somewhat humorous scene, speaks of the evils that are sure to follow when two wives are living under one roof. But at last he agrees to go, even though he feels his mistress will never thank him for having obeyed on this occasion.

Wu-niang has meanwhile reached the capital. She enters a Buddhist temple where she is asked to sing by two clowns who pretend to be mandarins. The long series of misfortunes that has followed her consistently does not forsake her at this point — the two clowns simply make sport of her and pay her nothing. After her disappointment she unrolls the pictures of her parents-in-law to render homage before them and to pray to Heaven that she may find her husband. At this very moment Tsai-yung enters to pray for a safe journey for his parents. The bonze asks Wu-niang to leave and to make room for the great man. She forgets the pictures in her haste, and Tsai-yung carries off the scroll without having looked at it closely. But Wu-niang recognizes him and makes inquiries in regard to his residence. In

this whole scene there is, as in many Chinese plays, a great deal of satire on Buddhist priests. One priest while saying a prayer is corrected by the abbot for mispronouncing one of the Sanskrit names for Buddha, Po-lo-t'ang instead of Po-lo-mi. The ignorant priest retorts, "Well, 't'ang' is sugar and 'mi' is honey; both are sweet, so what difference does it make?" An Occidental parallel for this scene would be the medieval priest who baptized, "In nomine patriae, filiae, et spiritus sanctae."

Wu-niang goes to her husband's house as a mendicant nun and meets Niu-hsi. In a scene which the Chinese commentators consider the best in the play she gradually tells her story and reveals her identity to her husband's second wife. Niu-hsi is touched by the filial piety of Wu-niang, calls her sister, and asks her to live with them. First she advises her how to reveal herself to her husband, namely by writing him a letter and placing it on his table in the library where he will be sure to find it. When Tsai-yung comes home he reads in the "Book of Annals", a collection of historical illustrations selected by Confucius to give point to his moral teachings. In every passage he finds a rebuke for his lack of filial piety, and when he finds Wu-niang's letter with the picture of his parents in their famished condition this means to him a greater reproof still. He begins to suspect that the messenger with the letter from his father had been an impostor. His wife's letter contains nothing but hidden allu-

sions to his actions. Among ancient examples quoted there is mention of one man to whom an emperor had offered his daughter but who had refused to degrade his wife to the rank of a concubine, and of another who had under similar circumstances repudiated his wife. Niu-hsi asks him whose conduct he approves of and he says the former's, of course. Then she asks whether, if his first wife were to step before him now clad in rags, he would not blush with shame and repudiate her? He answers that he would not, that he considers his marriage indissoluble. When Wu-niang appears and tells him her story he feels deep shame because an ironic fate had led him to serve his emperor but to neglect his parents. Since his parents have died Chinese etiquette demands that he give up his office for a number of years and mourn for the death of his father and mother. Tsai-yung with his two wives sets out to make a pilgrimage to the ancestral tomb to offer proper worship to the deceased. The emperor is going to give posthumous honors to his parents because of Wu-niang's faithfulness, and the historians will keep ever fresh the memory of the daughter-in-law's filial piety.

Even after the death of his parents the son must put their interests (or supposed interests) above his own by a three-year period of mourning, a space of time which is simply lost out of his life. In his "Chinese Characteristics", Doctor Arthur H. Smith points out the one-sidedness of the matter of filial

piety — the Chinese ethical code mentions no duties of the parents toward their children. His summary of the subject, given in the chapter on Filial Piety, seems most apropos of the action of this play:

“Every son has performed his filial duties to his father, and demands the same from his own son. That is what children are for. Upon this point the popular mind is explicit. ‘Trees are raised for shade, children are reared for old age.’ Neither parents nor children are under any illusions upon this subject. ‘If you have no children to foul the bed, you will have no one to burn paper at the grave.’ Each generation pays the debt which is exacted of it by the generation which preceded it, and in turn requires from the generation which comes after full payment to the uttermost farthing. Thus is filial piety perpetuated from generation to generation, and from age to age.”

Of course, this is as the matter appears to the Occidental from the outside. But for the Chinese, who has grown up in a deep veneration of Confucius, filial piety is the most laudable institution in existence. Confucius laid it down as a principle that in the relations of ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, there must be rule on one side and submission on the other. Moreover, the “Book of Filial Piety” condemns sharply “selfish attachment to wife and children”; in other words, if the claims of father and wife clash, the son must neglect his

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wife to serve his father. These things are among the bases of Chinese society on which it has outlived the Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Roman and other civilizations; it is small wonder therefore that they seem good to the Chinese. The other extreme perhaps is found in Anglo-Saxon countries where a son, on becoming of age, goes where he likes and does what he likes without feeling any responsibility toward his parents. To quote Doctor Smith once more, "To the Chinese such customs must appear like the behaviour of a well-grown calf or colt to the cow and the mare, suitable enough for animals, but by no means conformable to *li* (ethical standards) as applied to human beings. An attentive consideration of the matter from a Chinese standpoint will show that there is abundant room in our own social practice for improvement, and that most of us really live in glass houses, and would do well not to throw stones recklessly." To both the Westerner and the Chinese the practice of the other seems inferior, and neither can express an impartial opinion as to which is the better system. But the Westerner who wishes to understand the Chinese point of view can gain an insight into many things from reading "The Story of a Lute."



CHAPTER FOUR

THE DRAMA UNDER THE MANCHUS AND THE REPUBLIC—1644 TO THE PRESENT DAY

N 1644 the last of the Ming emperors committed suicide when a rebel army entered his capital. But the rebel did not become the next emperor; the throne went to a Manchu leader who, in characteristically Chinese manner, had been called in by the Ming ruler to help put down the rebellion. The Manchus soon established themselves as firm rulers of the land and forced all Chinese to adopt the queue. China became under their rule a strong and united empire; in fact, many writers believe that the reigns of K'ang Hsi (1662-1723) and of Ch'ien Lung (1736-1795) were the most glorious in all Chinese history. Both of these rulers were great warriors and administrators, as well as patrons of literature and the arts. The drama, too, flourished; a recently published catalogue of Chinese dramas records eight hundred and fifteen plays of some literary merit from the Ch'ing Dynasty.

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Among these the critics assign the first places to two historical tragedies written about the beginning of the eighteenth century: "The Blood-Stained Fan" (T'ao Hua Shan) by Kung Shang-jen and "The Palace of Eternal Life" (Ch'ang Shan Tien) by Hung Sen. The former deals with the last days of the Ming Dynasty. The author presents the struggles of the various parties and the dissensions among the generals in the face of a tottering throne. In the foreground of the revolutionary scene stand two lovers. The hero, a courageous young literary man, is forced to flee before his political enemies, and the heroine is likewise threatened. Since she prefers death to disgrace she attempts suicide. The play takes its name from the fact that some of her blood stained the fan her lover had presented to her. An artist, coming across this fan, painted the blood-stains into peach blossoms so cleverly as to deceive every one. After years of civil war, in the course of which the dynasty is overthrown, the lovers meet again. They feel that love has no place in a broken and disrupted fatherland; patriotism is higher than love—such seems to be the author's meaning.

The other play, "The Palace of Eternal Life", goes back to a much earlier period, that of the T'ang Dynasty. It has for hero and heroine the emperor Ming Huang, traditional founder of the Chinese theater, and his capricious concubine, Yang Kuei-fei. The Palace of Eternal Life was the name they had

given to the pleasure dome where the famous lovers gave themselves up to idyllic and voluptuous amusements.¹ This story is full of romantic and dramatic elements; there are said to be more than fifty plays that have Yang Kuei-fei for heroine. Versions by ballad singers have been well translated by George Carter Stent,² a Britisher who secured unprinted popular ballads by having street singers come to his house to recite them while his teacher wrote them down verbatim. Since Yang Kuei-fei and her lover play such an important part in the Chinese drama, it might be well to quote two of the numerous ballads about her.

AN IMPERIAL LOVER

Tang Ming-kuang loved Yang Kuei-fei —
 Living for her, in her, with her, —
 Walking by her, hither, thither —
 In the pleasant summer weather,
 Strolling hand in hand together.
 Side by side with Yang Kuei-fei,
 Listening to the play of fountains —
 Climbing up the mimic mountains —
 Through romantic scenery
 Of hill and lake, rock, dell and tree.

¹ A most readable biography in English has just been published by the Commercial Press, Shanghai: "Yang Kuei-fei", by Mrs. Wu Lien-teh. — In the *Mercure de France*, beginning August, 1922, there appeared a fascinating series of articles: "La Passion de Yang Kuei-fei", by Soulie, translations of songs by blind Chinese singers woven into the story of the greatest Chinese tale of love.

² "The Jade Chaplet, A Collection of Songs, Ballads, etc., from the Chinese." Trübner and Company, London, 1874.

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"If I had not Yang Kuei-fei,
What were all my Empire worth?
With her, earth is heaven to me, —
This is paradise on earth."

Mid-day in the lakelet found them,
Lotus leaves and blossoms round them;
Disporting gaily in the water,
(Daily to this place he brought her).
Now an avenue they tread,
Where the trees arch overhead, —
Saving just enough of space
To catch a glimpse of heaven's face,
Showing its intensest blue,
Peering down upon the two.

"If I had not Yang Kuei-fei,
What were all this lovely scene?
With her, walking thus by me, —
This is heaven, and she its queen."

On the sward beneath their feet,
Flowers of every hue were springing;
Bright plumed birds with voices sweet
Their passage here and there were winging.
Sheltered here from mid-day heat,
She taught to them the art of singing.¹
Now is heard from every tree
Leafy voices, softly uttering
Whispers, which sound mysteriously —
Like wings of angels, gently fluttering.

"If I had not Yang Kuei-fei,
What were all my empire worth?
With her, sitting thus by me, —
This is paradise on earth."

¹ The Chinese actually say that the birds imitated her voice in their notes.

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Streaks of light through foliage glancing —
Mixing, blending, interlacing —
Now retreating — now advancing —
Sunbeams after shadows racing,
Flinging on the sward a net-work
Of embroidered golden fret-work —
Quaintly beautifully grotesque,
As of *flickering* arabesque
Sculpt'd from sunbeams, light and shade,
Its ground the green enameled glade.

“ If I had not Yang Kuei-fei,
What were all this lovely scene?
With her, sitting thus by me, —
This is heaven, and she its queen.”

THE DEATH OF YANG KUEI-FEI

In silence unbroken,
They sat side by side;
Not a word had been spoken: —
They both of them tried
The dread that was o'er them
Of what lay before them
In their bosoms to hide.

What is that? In the distance a murmur is heard,
Is't the wail of the night wind — the surge of the sea?
As nearer it floats it takes form in a word —
And that word, Oh, God! is the name Yang Kuei-fei!
They listen, but speak not — though *both* know full
well

Those murmuring sounds are for *one* a death-knell.

Nearer, — still nearer
Those hoarse murmurs came:

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Now they sound clearer,
They shout out a name.
'T is Yang-fei's name they call!

Break her accursed thrall!
Too long we have borne it —
This night, we have sworn it —
Her life pays for all!

Where is she, — your minion, — frail Yang Kuei-fei?
Drag her forth — the vile traitress! our daggers would
see

If in her fair body the blood flows more pure
Than in those of your subjects who have had to endure
Wrongs, which her arts have heaped on them for years:¹
Whose bread has been moistened by blood, sweat and
tears!

Whose sons have been slaughtered — whose daughters
defiled!

Whose homes have been pillaged — whose fields made
a wild!

'T is she is the cause of rebellion and strife,²

We fight not your foes till we've taken her life!

¹ One of the many complaints against Yang Kuei-fei was her fancy for fresh *Li-chih's*. She was so fond of these, that she had them, when in season, brought from the South to Ch'ang An daily, a distance of three thousand *li*. This apparently simple fancy was the cause of immense suffering, distress, and injustice; the messengers carrying the luxury, presuming on the protection of their mistress, committed all manner of depredation and violence.

² Yang Kuei-fei had intrigued with a noble named An Lu-shan, who afterwards raised the standard of rebellion, it is said, with the hope of obtaining possession of her. Be that as it may, the Emperor assembled a large army, and accompanied by Yang Kuei-fei, went to meet him. On arriving at a place called Ma-kuei in Sze-chuen, the Emperor's troops mutinied, declaring that Yang Kuei-fei was the cause of the rebellion, and demanding her life, otherwise they would not fight. The Emperor, having no alternative, was forced to comply. Some say he ordered her to be strangled, and that this was done by the soldiers; others again, that she strangled herself — the latter appears the correct version.

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“Nought but the blood
Of Yang Kuei-fei
Can stem this flood
Of anarchy!”

“Oh! bitter destiny!
Oh! dire necessity!
Must I pronounce your doom?
Consign you to the tomb?”

“Alas! my Yang Kuei-fei,
I’m powerless to save!
My life — throne — empire — all I’d give
Had I the power to bid you live —
To snatch you from the grave.
Yet they have willed it thus — and I
Who’d die to save you, bid you die.”

“See I am calm, — it is not death I fear,
It is their savage mode of death I dread;
Say could you bear to see me lying here,
Weltering in blood, by ruthless butchers shed?”

“Fancy their bloody hands wreathed in my hair —
That silken hair you used so much to prize;
Dragged — struck — faint — bleeding! — could you
bear
To see all this before your very eyes?”

“Pierced by a hundred knives, my life-blood
flows
In purple streams — could you look on and see,
Unmoved — my murderers watch my dying throes —
With hungry eyes gloat on my agony?”

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"I have been vile, but let my penitence
In these last moments that to me are given,
Make some atonement for my great offence,
And Oh! 'forgive me as you'd be forgiven!'

"One last entreaty — let me die alone —
Let no one enter — none but you stand by
To watch my death; — the act, too, be my own;
Let not the ignoble rabble see me die.

"The means are here; I have but to unloose
This silken girdle from my slender waist;
I knot it thus, and thus, and form a noose,
This by my own hand round my neck is placed.

"With my own hands the ends are tightly drawn,
And I die thus" — scarce had the words been said —
A few brief struggles, and Yang-fei had gone
"With all her imperfections on her head."

"Hide her from my sight!
Let me not see
That face so ghastly white —
Those eyes so wildly bright
Glaring at me!

"They follow mine everywhere,
Look where I may —
On the earth — in the air,
Still the same glassy stare.
Take them away!

"Place her gently in the grave
E'en as she fell;
Here, where the willows wave,
Near this old well.

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Lightly cover her with earth —
Oh! Yang Kuei-fei!
What is all my empire worth
Now I've lost thee!"

During the Ch'ing Dynasty the native music was gradually superseded by a much cruder, less melodious product imported from barbarian lands. With the old style of music went many of the better plays; in many cases they were replaced by the so-called "military plays", that is to say acrobatic exhibitions of stage fighting to the accompaniment of crashing orchestral pandemonium. Toward the end of the Ch'ing Dynasty the Yuan drama had almost entirely vanished from the Peking stage. In a later chapter will be found a fuller discussion of the newer types of music.

But the chief innovation in the drama under the Manchu rule came through the influence of popular novels. Episodes from the famous novels read by everybody were brought on the stage in ever-increasing numbers. The novel, like the drama, is a literary form despised by the pundits and it too began to flourish during the Mongol Dynasty when the literary examinations were suppressed. Many novels are of unknown authorship, because their authors considered such works as beneath their dignity. But for the very reason that the authors did not employ the literary language the great masses of the people were able to enjoy these stories. Let it be remarked in passing that the novel is now coming

into its own and is receiving its just share of attention from scholars, at least from the progressive ones. Doctor Hu Shih, of the National University, Peking, has pointed out that it is the novel written in the vernacular that has given to spoken Chinese such unity as it possesses, and that it is through works in the popular language that a common speech for all China may ultimately be achieved. To-day, of course, natives of Peking, Shanghai, and Canton speak languages differing as widely as do those of Berlin, Amsterdam, and London, or Rome, Paris, and Madrid. Due to the crystallization of the written language, however, students from the three Chinese centers can read one another's letters, although, as I have often observed in laboratories or on the playground, when they converse they have recourse to English. It is due to their linguistic and literary importance that Doctor Hu Shih has edited critical editions of about a dozen famous Chinese novels.

Among the novels, "The Story of the Three Kingdoms" (San Kuo Ch'i) is by far the most popular. It was written in the Yuan Dynasty and deals with the period of romantic chivalry, 221-265 A.D., when three dynasties ruled in three separate capitals. In it appear the cruel Tsao Tsao and the resourceful Chu Ko-liang, together with many another brave warrior. Every educated Chinese has read it, and the illiterate coolies have hired readers, that they too may learn of the stirring adventures

of their more or less mythical heroes. The enthusiasm for this book is simply unbounded, as the following instance may serve to illustrate. Friends of mine in Peking, a young architect and his wife, were continually annoyed during hot August evenings by a fairly loud voice with a monotonous rising and falling inflection that kept coming over the wall of the adjoining courtyard from eight o'clock until midnight. It cast a shadow over conversation, it distracted attention from reading, and it effectually prevented peaceful sleep. My friends began by setting their victrola on their side of the wall to playing "Over There!" for an hour or two on end; next they sent out the house boy to buy fire-crackers and ordered him to set off package after package under a tin pail; and finally they allowed a bottle of asafetida to trickle over the wall—but all to no avail. They recovered neither their peace of mind nor their slumber until the *shuo-shu-te* had read to his coolie audience the last chapter of "The Three Kingdoms", a novel as long as the whole Bible.

An endless number of plays are based on this book of romantic history, which deserves to be called the national epic of the Chinese. A long list of "military plays" derive their plots from the "Shui Hu Chuan" (Story of the River Bank), a novel based upon the doings of a band of brigands who terrorized a number of provinces early in the twelfth century. Some of the swashbucklers in this story

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had Robin Hood's habit of giving to the poor what they had stolen from the rich and corrupt officials. From the "Liao Chai" (translated by Mr. Giles, "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio") come many plays dealing with fairies and other supernatural beings. The novel that might be considered a possible rival in popularity to the story of "The Three Kingdoms", is "The Dream of the Red Chamber" (Hung Lou Meng), the story of the love of a young idler for his two pretty cousins, and the decay of an old and wealthy family. Poetic love stories from this novel were brought on the stage only in recent years by Mei Lan-fang, the actor who is responsible for many innovations in the Peking theater. The play, "Burying the Flowers", mentioned in the chapter on Mei Lan-fang, is one example of a dramatization of an episode from this book.

In his "Geschichte der chinesischen Litteratur" the German scholar Wilhelm Grube, who knew the Chinese character well, remarks in discussing the novel that a ruse or a sly calculation on the part of a warrior seems to appeal to the Chinese much more than actual bravery on the battle field. A number of plays taken from the story of "The Three Kingdoms" bear out this point by reason of their perennial popularity. No play perhaps is oftener acted than "The Ruse of the Empty City" (Kung Chuan Chi). The famous hero Chu Ko-liang is in a city stripped of all its defenders when suddenly a strong



WARRIOR-ACROBATS

enemy force arrives. He orders the gates to be opened wide as though peace were reigning throughout the country, and seats himself on the wall above the gate. When the advance guard of the enemy arrives it finds the commander, who more than any other is known for his resourcefulness and his stratagems, calmly reading a book in the face of the threatening attack. Naturally enough the enemy fears an ambush of some sort and withdraws. By his calm Chu Ko-liang has saved a city; his bluff has won.

Another "peculiar" (as Bret Harte would put it) play from the same source is "Hsü Mu Ma Tsao" (Hsü's Mother Curses Tsao Tsao). The famous general Tsao Tsao found that he was being defeated continually through the clever stratagems suggested to his opponent by a certain Hsü Su. He therefore plotted to get this clever adviser into his hands in order that he might profit by his knowledge of strategy. For this purpose he kidnaped Hsü Su's mother and sent a forged letter asking the son to come to her. Filial piety demanded that Hsü Su obey and therefore he came into Tsao Tsao's camp only to be forced into the service of his enemy. When Hsü Su's mother heard how her son had been tricked she went to Tsao Tsao's tent, called him a man without honor, a traitor, and a wretched deceiver. This scene, when the tottering old lady scolds in a shrill voice, as only a Chinese woman can *ma*, is of course the *pièce de résistance* of the play.

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When she has spoken out her mind she returns to her own tent and commits suicide. Although Tsao Tsao continued to hold Hsü Su, yet the latter never offered a single stratagem to the general, an outstanding piece of bravery according to the Chinese view. The very favorite play from this novel is "Ch'un Yin Hui" (The Meeting of Many Heroes). When this play is staged with the parts of the great heroes of the novel filled by stars, the Chinese theater lovers feel that such an ensemble offers about the finest thing possible. The plot again turns chiefly upon a ruse by Chu Ko-liang. His side is facing tremendous odds in the huge fleet of wooden vessels under the control of the enemy, and therefore his commander decides to attack them with fiery arrows. Chu Ko-liang is commissioned to procure 100,000 arrows, and is given for this task five days, which he himself cuts down to three. Two and a half days he spends in calm meditation, doing nothing about the arrows. When one of his comrades discovers him sitting under a tree he is very much alarmed at the waste of time and suggests that the only thing left for his friend is to commit suicide. But our hero is undaunted. He places a number of straw men in the prows of a few boats and sails toward the position of the enemy. Owing to the dense fog the enemy commander is unable to ascertain the size of the attacking force, but he orders his archers to shoot as fast as they can. The arrows strike the straw men and pierce them with-

out doing any harm. When 100,000 arrows have been caught up in his decoys, Chu Ko-liang orders his boats to retreat, and thus is able to deliver the required number of arrows to his commander on time. The manner in which the play is staged, with two or three arrows flitting across the scene, provides, at least for the Westerner, a distinct anticlimax.

Another play in which three stars play together to good effect is "The Three Strange Meetings" (Ch'i San Hui) or, as it is popularly nicknamed, "The Three Pulls." It is a popular comedy written during the time of the Manchu Dynasty, and is one of the favorite plays of Mei Lan-fang. Through his great prestige he is able to induce other stars to play with him, and when he presents the rôle of the wife supported by Chü Su-yün as husband and Li Shou-shan as father, the Chinese consider it a perfect performance. The play is rich in glimpses of Chinese life and also full of excellent opportunities for the actors to show their mettle. The opening of the play is also most unusual, for, like Goethe's "Faust" and some of our other famous plays, it has a prologue in heaven. There is as a general thing no curtain used in the Chinese theater, a rule to which a scene in heaven forms an exception. Stage hands bring on a curtain about eight feet high and twelve feet wide, supported by bamboo poles and painted with clouds and bats to symbolize the sky. Behind this the stage is set for the divine scene.

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When the curtain is removed the spectator sees a god seated on a high throne. Four spirits bearing tall shields painted with the conventionalized cloud pattern stand by his side. The horns of the orchestra are blown mightily and fireworks are set off until finally the god begins to speak in a slow, impressive bass. Like a Homeric Zeus he sends a messenger to earth to free a certain innocent man who is languishing in prison. The messenger is ordered to find the man's daughter and to conduct her to the prison. The divine herald departs, carrying a horsehair switch, the conventional symbol by which a spirit may be recognized on the Chinese stage.

The next scene begins the first of the four acts on earth: 1. The Weeping in Prison; 2. Writing the Petition; 3. The Three Pulls; 4. The Family Reunited.

Li Kuei-chih (played by Mei Lan-fang), newly married to a young magistrate, visits the prison, inspired by the divine messenger. There she sees the jailer mistreating an old man, in whom, to her surprise and grief, she recognizes her father, from whom she had been separated in childhood at the time of his unjust condemnation. The jailer is willing to relent after the daughter, without disclosing her identity, has paid him a good-sized bribe. Li Kuei-chih then asks her husband to make an effort to free her father by writing an appeal to a higher court. The husband complies very willingly, but, in order to write the petition he must know his wife's

"little name", a sort of family nickname of the little girls, which, according to Chinese custom, is never revealed to the husband. There ensues a fine comedy scene in which the wife at first withholds and then shamefacedly tells her "little name", to the great triumph of her husband. In presenting the petition to the judge of the higher court, the wife is recognized by the judge as his long-lost sister. He rises from his seat, and discarding the stiff formality of the courtroom, pulls Li Kuei-chih out of the room in order to reveal his identity to her in the privacy of his home. The husband is told of this by the servant, and rushes to the court in a rage, because he fears that the judge has been induced by his wife's beauty to make her his concubine. The judge is not in the courtroom, but he sends out two officers to bring the husband also into his home. The second of the three pulls comes when the messengers drag the husband off-stage in a state of comical terror; for, like a true Oriental, he fears sudden death,—a fear that caused Abraham to lie to the Pharaoh of Egypt about his relationship to the beautiful Sarah. In the next scene brother, sister, and husband are happily reunited. The father is summoned from the prison into the court. He recognizes his son, the presiding judge, and gratefully bows toward the audience (that is, toward heaven) for, according to Chinese custom, a father dare never bow toward his son, no matter what position the latter may hold. Thereupon the father is also pulled off-stage to com-

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plete the happy family reunion. The jailer, knowing full well what manner of unpleasant death may be in store for him, ends his life by jumping down a well.

This last-named action is accomplished by the jailer's making a quick leap and running off-stage, the conventional expression for suicide by drowning. The court scenes, especially when the play is given by Mei Lan-fang, abound in gorgeous costumes of richly embroidered silk. The various characters wear historically correct dress, the Manchu robes with wide sleeves. So far as my own observation goes, I have found that for Manchu or Ming Dynasty events the styles of the respective periods are followed, but that beyond this no attempt is made at providing historically correct costume. Characters in plays taking place before the Ming Dynasty wear Ming costume; it is the style worn before the coming of the Manchus and therefore serves for all ancient settings.

The actor who plays the part of the husband in this play is Chu Su-yün. He is nearly fifty years old, but he continues to play the rôle of the lover opposite Mei Lan-fang, because there is no younger man who can do it half so well. He is really as good as any Occidental comedian in assuming the expressions of surprise, anger, or terror; he stutters admirably whenever necessary, and in laughing gets a comical effect by means of his faulty teeth, blackened by opium smoking. In another play, "Ngoh

Chia Chuan" (The Ngoh Family Village), he plays the part of a young boy who has prodigious strength; in fact, he, though a mere child, protects his family's home by killing two generals. In one of the first scenes the parents forbid their abnormally strong offspring to handle dangerous weapons, whereupon this actor in the costume of a child goes into tantrums of weeping that convulse the audience by their realistic imitation of the overgrown baby. Li Shou-shan, in the rôle of the father, is made up as a fine, dignified old Chinese gentleman. He brings out very poignantly the tragic situation of the helpless old man unjustly imprisoned; though perhaps by some of his pitiful wails he somewhat overdoes his part.

Another very popular domestic drama is "Ta Chih Shang Wen" (Beating the Nephew and Worshipping at the Grave). The Chinese prodigal son is Ta Kuan, an orphan boy raised by his uncle. Wicked companions taught him gambling and other ways of squandering money, and as he needed funds for these pursuits he insisted that his uncle give him his paternal heritage. In a short time, of course, all his substance has been wasted with riotous living and Ta Kuan is forced to beg for his food. His uncle at that time is distributing alms among the poor and the nephew is not ashamed to appear among the beggars at his uncle's door. Naturally, the uncle's "loss of face" is tremendous; he becomes extremely angry and chases Ta Kuan off with

blows. But his aunt, in the kindness of her heart, gives him some money and urges him to avoid his angered uncle. But in China too there is a destiny that shapes our ends: Ta Kuan's money is stolen from him, and with no prospects whatever before him, he suddenly becomes pious and worships at his father's grave. While he is busy burning paper money (i.e. paper imitations of silver ingots) for the spirits of his ancestors his uncle and aunt happen also to visit the family graveyard. The moment Ta Kuan sees them, remembering his uncle's blows and curses, he runs away. His foster-father is very much surprised that some one should have been burning paper money at his brother's tomb. He never would have suspected his nephew of such an action, but when he finds that it really was Ta Kuan, his heart is touched by such a display of filial piety that he sends for the nephew, inviting him to return to his house, and then persuades him to study under the direction of a teacher. There has been a real change of heart in the youth, for he applies himself diligently to his task. And virtue is not without its reward; for when Ta Kuan takes the examination he passes with the very highest honors.

A play similar to the previous one in that it is much more moral than probable is "Chu Sha Chü" (A Cinnabar Spot). A certain elderly gentleman by the name of Han was very unhappy because he had no son. To remedy this condition he bought himself a concubine; but when the marriage was

about to be consummated, the bride wept bitterly. Han asked the cause of the tears at such an inappropriate time, and learned that his new spouse was in reality a married woman who had allowed herself to be sold to aid her sick husband. The old man took pity on her, burned the marriage contract, and presented her with more money for her unfortunate husband. A noble and unusual action, to be sure, which merited and received an unusual reward! The woman returned to her husband and the latter recovered at once. Returned once more to health, he went about his business which carried him to Sze-chuan province. He brought with him a present for his benefactor, a young boy whom he had bought in a district afflicted by famine. Han was very much pleased with the bright boy and devoted himself eagerly to his education. He gradually remarked that the boy resembled him a great deal and began to wonder if it might not be possible that it was his own son, who had been carried off a few years before in the course of a rebellion. One day it occurred to him to examine the sole of the boy's foot, and there he found the very same cinnabar spot that had always been his own distinguishing mark. This proved conclusively that it was his own son, and both were very happy over the reunion that had been brought about through Han's kindness to a poor woman!

The moral Chinese stage sets forth not only the reward of virtue, but also the punishment of vice.

There can be seen on the Peking stage almost any day a warning to cruel husbands called "Pang Ta Pao Ch'ing Lang" (Beating the Heartless Husband). Mu Chi was a scholar holding the first degree (*Hsiu Tsai*, corresponding somewhat to our A.B.), but he was very poor because his parents had not left him any property whatsoever. When a famine struck the country he was forced to beg for his bread. In his half-starved condition he was one day caught in a snowstorm, in the course of which he fell to the ground more dead than alive. In this condition the daughter of the head of the beggar's guild found him lying before the door of her home. She took pity on him and nursed him back to health. At first her father was none too pleased with his daughter's action; but when the daughter represented that the gods would surely reward her good deed, he became reconciled to the presence of the young man in the house. The daughter fell in love with her protégé and was very proud of his rank as a *Hsiu Tsai*. The father also became quite fond of the young man and gave him his daughter in marriage. Then it was arranged that Mu Chi was to go to Peking to take the examination, while his wife and father-in-law were to go along to beg and thus furnish the young man with a living until such time as he should have secured a profitable post. Mu Chi passed the examination and was appointed the magistrate of a town. The moment he had received his appointment he became extremely disdainful of his

new relatives and in the course of the journey by boat to the town where he was to become magistrate he pushed his wife overboard into the stream and drove off his father-in-law. However, a certain high official saved the life of the beggar chief's daughter and adopted her as his child. When he had learned from her the story of her husband's ingratitude he decided to punish the wretch properly. He called on him in his magistracy and offered him his daughter in marriage. Mu Chi, the cad, naturally was glad to marry into the family of such an influential man, and accepted eagerly. But what was his chagrin and fright when on the evening of his marriage he raised the bride's veil to find under it the beggar's daughter! The official then entered the bridal chamber with a powerful stick and ordered the beggar's daughter to give Mu Chi a sound thrashing. This she did with a great deal of "heart", as the Chinese say, for which no one can blame her. But Mu Chi decided to become a wiser and a better man; he sent out men to find his father-in-law, and the three lived happy ever after.

But the very crowning piece of righteous moral indignation in all the Flowery Kingdom is found in a story connected with Yo Fei, deified as the god of war and worshiped as a special patron of the theater. In his lifetime Yo Fei was a faithful general of the Sung emperors, a great fighter against the Mongols. In fact, he had almost succeeded in capturing the Mongol emperor with his entire army

when the enemy bribed some high Chinese officials, chief among them Ch'in Kuei, to do away with their great patriotic leader. Yo Fei was summoned before a court for trial, but was cleared of all charges. Then he was tried again before Ch'in Kuei and two other judges, this time being condemned to death by strangling. Before the sentence was carried out, his cruel executioners tore the skin off his back where his mother had tattooed the famous inscription, "I repay the state with integrity and loyalty."

At Hangchow is found the tomb of this great Chinese patriot. Before it, as every tourist sees to his surprise, are four statues in a kneeling position and bound with chains, while an inscription invites the wanderer to urinate on them.¹ These villains, who are literally in very bad odor, are Ch'in Kuei, his wife, and the two other judges who condemned Yo Fei to death. This drastic, posthumous punishment seems to have had very little effect in furthering patriotism in China, for in recent decades neither the Russians nor the Japanese seem ever to have had any trouble in finding Chinese statesmen willing to accept bribes for the betrayal of their country. The story is also told that in 1678, fully 500 years after Yo Fei's death, this play was performed in a certain town, when suddenly an excited spectator rushed on the stage and stabbed to death the unfortunate actor

¹ For similar practices among the Romans, see Sumner, "Folkways", page 445.

who was playing the part of Ch'in Kuei, the traitor. In the course of the trial this fervent patriot told that in all his books he had carefully cut out the name of Ch'in Kuei wherever it occurred. The man was not put to death, as would have been the case had he been a Britisher, nor was he celebrated as a hero, as would have been the case had he been a Frenchman, but in characteristic Chinese manner he was dismissed as an idiot.

Though as a general thing there is very little courtship on the part of young people in China, yet there are on the stage quite a number of romantic love stories. In the chapter on Mei Lan-fang I have mentioned some taken from the novel, "Dream of the Red Chamber." The same actor frequently presents "Yü Chan Chih" (A Precious Hairpin), the plot of which might be an Occidental love story. In a certain convent the abbess had living with her the daughter of her deceased brother, a very attractive young girl by the name of Ch'en Miao. In the vicinity there lived also the abbess' nephew, with whom, because of his personal charm and great learning, the young lady fell in love. One day the nephew became ill and Ch'en Miao asked permission to assist in taking care of the patient. Under the tender care of such an attractive nurse the young man recovered speedily, but he too had lost his heart. He found means to visit Ch'en Miao in her room one day as she was reading poetry, whereupon, like Paolo and Francesca, that day they read no more.

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In the village there lived an elderly magistrate who wished to marry Ch'en Miao, but when the generous judge learned that she loved a younger rival, he did not show any signs of jealousy; on the contrary, he went to the abbess to urge her to join in marriage the young lovers.

Peking theaters have very few properties, as has been stated, but behind practically every stage one finds a pair of plaster-of-Paris lions in imitation of the marble lions that guard the gateways of Chinese palaces and temples. They are used in a very popular play called "Chü T'eng Kuan Hua" (Trial of Strength and Viewing the Ancestral Portraits). The play seems to be a modern imitation of the Yuan Dynasty drama "The Orphan of the Chao Family." A wicked minister persuades the emperor that an entire family, one of whose members he hates, must be exterminated root and branch. A friend decides to save the family name by substituting just before the execution his own young son for a child of the condemned family. His wife absolutely refuses to enter upon his plan, but when he kneels before her she is compelled to yield to his wishes to sacrifice her child; this is typical of the Chinese, inasmuch as they seem to think that when some one humbles himself unduly he must gain his end and other people must grant him whatever he asks. The man and his wife then bring up the orphan as their own son. The child they sacrificed was chopped into three pieces by the wicked minister

himself, because he feared that it might some day revenge on him the slaughter of his relatives.

The play as given in Peking theaters opens at the time when the orphan has attained the age of fifteen. He and his servant are playing in the courtyard of his foster-father's house. The boy proposes that they make a test of their strength by moving the stone lions standing at the door of the house. The servant tries in vain to move them, while the boy, a prodigy of strength, picks up the massive stones and moves them with ease. Soon afterward the master of the house returns and asks angrily who is responsible for displacing the stone lions. The good-natured servant, who has the rôle of the clown in this play, says that he did it. His master then orders him to return them to their proper place, and thus in a comedy scene he is soon proved a liar. Then the adopted son is called; like George Washington he acknowledges what he has done, and returns the lions to their proper places without the slightest trouble. His foster-father now perceives that although but fifteen years of age, the boy is strong enough to avenge the cruel injustice done his family. Therefore he conducts him into the ancestral temple where he shows him the portraits of his ancestors down to the ones put to death by the wicked minister. No sooner has the orphan boy heard the story than he puts on his armor and sets out on his mission of revenge on the enemy of his family. Incidentally there is often a bit of comedy of a simple

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kind thrown in by the stage hands when they remove the stone lions, which they pretend to find very heavy.

On one occasion when I saw this play I was surprised to hear the audience break out into peals of laughter at the point when the boy set out on his errand of revenge. I inquired the cause of this from a Chinese friend. Amid sobs of mirth he told me that the orphan boy had left the temple on horse-back! As usual, there was no scenery, the stage was bare, only a picture suspended from a chair set on a table marked the locality as an ancestral temple. The actor dressed for war had absent-mindedly acted as though he were on the battle field and had made with his leg the conventional sign for mounting a horse. I had not noticed the gesture at all, as it was a rather inconspicuous one. The humor of the episode is of about the same variety as that engendered years ago in the Philadelphia Little Theater when, in the course of the action, a cat wandered on the stage and in her haste to remove him an actress thrust him into the glowing stage fireplace—in reality, of course, off-stage into the wings.

In this imitation of a Yuan drama, in fact of the drama that several Western writers have called the nearest approach to true tragedy among all Chinese plays, practically all that is presented to modern audiences is the farcical element. Of farces the Chinese stage possesses many, some good and some

less so. A certain Liu Yen-ming, in a farce by that name, lends money to a magistrate for a journey to the capital. The loan is arranged, like most things in China, through a third party—in this case an abbess of a convent. When a year has elapsed and the magistrate has not returned, Liu demands his money, or, in case the abbess cannot repay him, the hand of Yu Ying, the magistrate's pretty daughter. He brings such pressure to bear by means of threats that the abbess finally agrees to arrange a rendezvous at midnight in the Convent of Great Purity. Yu Ying naturally enough refuses to marry a man just because her father owes him money, but when the abbess pictures the old miser as a dashing youth of twenty-three she gradually changes her tone and at last gives her consent. At midnight, therefore, Liu Yen-ming stealthily approaches the convent, but unfortunately he meets with a patrol of police who arrest the nocturnal prowler as he is unable to account for his presence near the convent at such an unseemly hour. Instead of in the arms of his beloved the money-lender spends the night in jail. But much more disagreeable for him is another development of the story. A young scholar on his way to the capital is on the same road when he observes that the police have arrested Liu Yen-ming. He decides that the police must be very strict in these parts and so demands hospitality at the very next house, which is of course the convent. The door is opened by a novice who has been told by the

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abbess what to do; the young scholar is asked to enter and to await the young lady. The youth, though somewhat surprised, is wise enough to hold his tongue and to follow instructions. Soon Yu Ying enters and finds that the young man possesses all the charms the abbess had falsely attributed to her father's creditor. Love at first sight, then follow mutual explanations, and before morning an engagement sealed by pledges.

A rather good scene follows when on the next day the abbess calls on the miser to felicitate him on the pleasant night he has spent! There are delightful misunderstandings, but at the end of the scene Liu Yen-ming is in a towering rage, and determined to have revenge. He forces the daughter of his debtor to become a maid in his tavern, where she must perform the most menial tasks. In the end, of course, the young scholar returns from the capital as a magistrate; he enters the very inn where his beloved is serving the guests, recognizes and rescues her, giving the miser the punishment he so richly deserves.

One evening when I had gone to see Mei Lan-fang at the Chen Kwang Theater, there was performed as the last play among the curtain raisers another farce, "San Yao Hui" (Shaking Dice). This farce is much less presentable in every way, but is, I believe, more typical of the present-day drama, because of its episodic nature and lack of real plot. On the eve of the husband's return the

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wife and the concubine are quarreling as to which is to share his first night at home. The dispute waxes hot and violent; herewith follows a prize specimen of the dialogue:

Wife: He has no right to have a concubine.

Concubine: He would not have one, if you were able to bear him a son.

Wife: Don't say that, for before I was married I had several sons.

Two neighbors, the clowns in the piece, enter and after much discussion suggest that the women settle the disagreement by shaking dice. Three dice are used, and the wife throws a score of seventeen. The concubine then prostrates herself before the house god and when her dice are counted it is found that she has eighteen points. She is victorious!

Probably about as much as one fourth of the drama played in China at the present time deals with religious or mythological subjects. Kuan-yin, the goddess of mercy, the Buddhist madonna, very frequently figures in these plays, releasing unfortunates from punishments and otherwise doing deeds of kindness. A direct contrast to her is found in the cruel judge of the lower world. In the Field Museum, Chicago, there are exhibits portraying a number of Chinese religious plays and the curator, Doctor Berthold Laufer, has written an excellent guidebook dealing with these theatrical representations having for their aim the inculcation of better morals through the fear of punishments in the here-

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after. I cannot resist quoting from Doctor Laufer on the typically Chinese attitude toward this form of religious drama:

It must not be supposed, however, that the Chinese have ever in reality practiced the tortures demonstrated in the ten courts of Purgatory. This lore is not their own, they adopted it from India. It is the visual illustration of what is described in the sacred books of the Buddhists. On the stage, moreover, everything is mitigated and permeated by a willful, grotesque humor which makes it difficult for the spectator to take these punishments too seriously. Skeptical and rationalistic as many of the Chinese are, they will be moved to smile at this performance, or to entertain doubt as to its reality. The baroque features and semi-comic gestures of the devils contribute to the relief and exhilaration of the audience. The visitor should bear in mind that he is witnessing a fine piece of scenic illusion, which, while moralistic at its root and ethical in its tendency, is far from being calculated to shock the nerves or frighten the conscience, but which, on the contrary, will encourage and elevate by pointing the way to ultimate salvation. The keynote of this drama is not misery and despair, but hope and the possibility of self-perfection.

A favorite example of the mythological drama is the story of "The White and the Black Snake" (Po She Chuan), taken from a novel of the same name. Two snake demons took on the form of lovely virgins. One day they quarreled and the White Snake said to the black, "If you can defeat me in a fight I'll serve you, but if you are beaten you shall be my slave." The White Snake won and according to

the agreement the other became her servant. In a former incarnation a certain young man had saved the life of the White Snake and she decided to reward him by becoming his beautiful and loving wife. Their marriage was indeed a very happy one for a time. It is a Chinese custom on the fifth day of the fifth month to drink a cup of wine containing a certain blossom which acts as a charm against venomous animals. Hsü Hsuan, the husband, followed this custom and gave some also to his unsuspecting wife. The White Snake felt uncomfortable after this draught and retired early. Hardly had she gone to sleep when she lost her human form and was changed into a snake. When her husband later on parted the curtains of their bed, he saw a huge white snake lying there, raising her head toward him and spewing fire. Hsü Hsuan was so frightened that he fell to the ground dead. Aroused by the noise, the Black Snake came on the scene and awoke her mistress, who on awakening once more took on human form. When she realized what she had unwittingly done, she burst into tears; but she soon recalled that on the mountain dominated by the God of Long Life there grew an herb capable of restoring the dead to life. She hurried to this mountain to steal a bit of the herb. But the God of Long Life saw her and in great anger pursued her. By means of enveloping her in the fumes of a charm against snakes he captured her; but on learning for what purpose she had come to steal he not only re-

leased her, but presented her with the herb. By means of it the dead man was soon restored to life.

The two demons wished to please Hsü Hsuan in every way, but in doing him favors they harmed the community. They robbed the state treasury to enrich their favorite; but the treasurer was beheaded in consequence. Thereupon they opened a drug store and in order to make the business prosper they spread various diseases in the village. But the abbot of a nearby monastery discovered their tricks. He visited Hsü Hsuan under the pretense of collecting alms and warned him that he had better come for a time to the monastery to be freed from the influence of evil demons that were besetting him. Hsü Hsuan, who remembered only too well his experience on the fifth day of the fifth month, was glad to go. He told his wife that he was going to the temple to worship.

But when her husband failed to return, the White Snake decided to go to the monastery to seek him. On the way she confessed to her servant that she was soon going to give birth to a child, an event which she hoped would give great pleasure to Hsü Hsuan. The two snakes in human form rode in a boat to the monastery which was located on an island. The abbot met them and sternly ordered them off lest he destroy them utterly by means of his magic power. Full of anger the two demons drew their magic swords against the abbot, but the latter tossed into the air his cane with a dragon's

head, which was changed immediately into a living dragon and attacked the two snakes so savagely that they were forced to flee for their lives. But by means of their magic they sent a flood which threatened to destroy the island. The abbot, surrounded by all his priests, spread his garment at the edge of the water, thereby causing the island to rise in the same degree as the water. At this point K'uei Shing, god of the literati, arrived like the *deus ex machina* of a Euripidean play. He had been sent by Wen Chang, the god of science and literature, to put an end to the quarrel because the son of Hsü Hsuan and the White Snake was destined to obtain the highest degree in the literary examinations. Thus the island was saved and the snakes returned home unscathed.

Hsü Hsuan, on the abbot's advice, also set out for home, and met his wife with her servant on a bridge. The Black Snake drew her sword to avenge on him the humiliation done her mistress, but the White Snake protected him from the fury of her servant. Both were overcome by their emotions; they wept in silence, unable to put their feelings into words, in this struggle between love and fear. Soon afterward the son was born; but three days later the god Wen Chang abducted the two demons to his magic pagoda, while Hsü Hsuan was left in wistful happiness with his promising son, the greatest boon in the life of a Chinese.

This charming story, by the way, forms the

basis of Grimm's tale, "The White and the Black Snake."

I have never seen the first part of this play, but on several occasions I saw the visit of the snakes to the island monastery called "Chin Shan-tze." One of these performances was at the annual benefit for the poor riksha-runners of Peking organized by that widely beloved American missionary, Mrs. Goodrich. As the play was given at the theater of the foreign community, many of the crudities and incongruities of the Chinese stage were absent. The orchestra was not sitting on the stage and was muffled somewhat. Back and side drops with good lighting effects served to set off well the colorful robes of the shaven-headed monks praying before an immense image of Buddha. The fighting staged by the demon warriors was an exhibition of graceful and acrobatic movements that would do credit to a Russian ballet. The story with all its pathos was very well acted, so that the whole formed a memorable performance such as would, I am sure, delight American audiences if a theatrical manager were to engage Mei Lan-fang with his troupe for a tour.

In Chapter Six are mentioned the many seasonal plays of the Chinese theater which make of this institution a true folk theater. In concluding this chapter I shall quote a synopsis of the libretto of "Ch'ang-O Pin Yüeh" (Ch'ang-O's Flight to the Moon). This playlet is one of those into which Mei

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Lan-fang has woven his graceful dances, an innovation on his part on the Chinese stage. I follow the translation given on the program at a performance before the American College Club on November 17, 1917.

FOREWORD

The youthful Emperor Ho Yi of the Hsia Dynasty (about 2,000 B.C.) being of divine origin, as a child played with fairies. When he grew to manhood, he was in a dream led by fairies to the palace of the Heavenly Queen, Hsi Wang Mu, who gave the young Emperor the Elixir of Life. Ch'ang-O, the Imperial Concubine of Ho Yi, famed for her grace and beauty, learned of this precious gift and in childish innocence drank it, scarcely realizing what she had done. Filled with remorse and shame, upon being apprised of the gravity of her offence, she flew to the moon, where because of her wonderful beauty she was elected by the moon fairies as their queen. The scene of the play is laid in the moon and has to do with the preparations for and the celebration of the Mid-Autumn Festival with Ch'ang-O, the Queen of the Moon, as the central figure and the moon fairies and their invited guests as participants.

SYNOPSIS

FIRST ACT. — The scene depicts a garden blossoming in celestial flowers, with Ch'ang-O plucking the flowers to be used in making the wines for the Mid-Autumn Festival Banquet.

CH'ANG-O opens with a song in praise of the beautiful surroundings in which she is about to pick flowers. (*Speaks*) Since arriving in the Moon, I have had a very pleasant time. The hot summer is now past and Mid-Autumn is come. In preparation for the celebration of

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the Festival, I look forward with delight to the making of wine for the entertainment of the fairies whom I am inviting to my feast. (*Sings*) Deftly though I roll up my sleeves and lightly though I pluck the flowers, I cannot help brushing off the bees and butterflies. This sprig is full of fragrance and is weighed down with abundance and splendor. That one is yet in bud. And when I lift up my eyes I behold above me a tree that reaches to the clouds. Lifting my hand I begin to pluck the flowers. (*Speaking*) Ah! How beautiful! I have so soon filled my basket with flowers, and now I must carry them home to make my wine. (*Singing*) How thickly do the butterflies follow in my trail!

SECOND ACT. — The Moon Fairies invite other fairies to the Banquet.

THIRD ACT. — The invited guests proceed to the Banquet Hall.

FOURTH ACT. — The Moon Palace. The Moon Fairies dust the Palace and make preparations for the coming Banquet and the receiving of their guests.

FIFTH ACT. — The Banquet. Ch'ang-O, under the influence of wine, soliloquises on the lonesomeness of her life amid her present surroundings and yearns for the companionship of mortals and more particularly of Ho Yi.

CH'ANG-O (*singing*). Forsaking the mortal world, I have come to the Moon to be Queen of the Fairies. My time has passed so pleasantly and fast that I have lost all count of time. I have gathered flowers and made wine, and have invited other fairies to join me on this festive occasion. (*Sitting in meditation*) Spring and autumn come and go, as the evening follows the morn. My time has flown by pleasantly amidst these beautiful surroundings. Once a year the moon is fullest on this night.

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Heaven and earth are happy in mutual enjoyment. (*Speaking*) This day is the Mid-Autumn Festival. I have directed the Palace to be dusted and cleaned. The attendants have conveyed the invitations to the fairies to share with me in my happiness. You, attendants, await their arrival. (*The fairies arrive and sit down to feast.*)

FAIRIES. O Queen! behold the mortal world! See how every family on earth prepares its delicious food and wine to offer to thee as sacrifice? (*Ch'ang-O speaking*) Let me look. (*Ch'ang-O is moved and the fairies speak.*)

FAIRIES. Why, Queen, dost thou feel so sad?

CH'ANG-O. Look at the mortals and see how they celebrate in couples. A hundred times better are they than we who lead a lonesome life.

FAIRIES. Do not speak thus, O Queen! But partake more of this beautiful wine and drown thy sorrow.

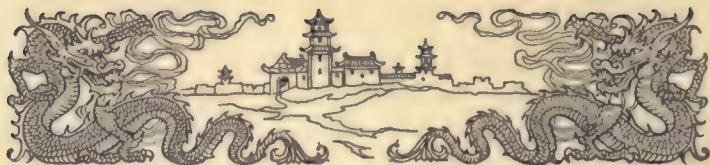
CH'ANG-O. Then let us drink. (*Lifts her cup.*)

(*Ch'ang-O is overcome with wine and the fairies take their leave.*)

CH'ANG-O. When we were feasting I perceived how mortals celebrated this happy occasion in couples and enjoyed each other's company. The thought of my lonely life fills me with sorrow. (*Singing*) I go down by marble steps and part the crystal curtains to see how mortal couples live and prepare fresh fruits and delicious wines to celebrate the Festival. Here I see a family feasting and chatting, there a group walking hand in hand, and others while away their time in their modest homes, while I sit in my Palace, lonely and companionless. Ah! who is there to pity me? (*Speaking*) Deeply do I regret my offence of stealing the Elixir of Life. As punishment I am now destined to spend my nights in sorrow.

(*Fairies reappear to escort Ch'ang-O to visit the Heavenly Queen, Hsi Wang Mu.*)

(*Exeunt all.*)



CHAPTER FIVE

MODERN TENDENCIES

DURING the last decades of the Ch'ing Dynasty, that is to say about forty years ago, many of the idle and rich members of the ruling class, the Manchus, developed an interest in the theater. The government provided these men with an income but imposed no duties on them; and while a large number filled the time that hung heavy on their hands by smoking opium, others imitated the work of the socially disinherited actor. Sometimes princes of the royal family appeared on the stage in much the same spirit of a search for new sensations in which others impersonated beggars on the streets. Naturally enough, such undignified behavior was highly disapproved of in government circles, and therefore the idlers who spent most of their time in the theaters found it more expedient to perform in private when their artistic natures felt the itch for self-expression. For this purpose clubs were formed

called *p'iao yu*, friends of the theater or amateurs. It is interesting to note that many of the palaces of the princes of the Manchu Dynasty in the vicinity of Peking are provided with stages where the theater lovers could perform in private. Many wealthy merchants followed this fashion set by the princes, and in recent years also a large number of students have devoted their leisure time to the study of acting. To-day the number of amateurs in Peking is enormous; there is such a craze for acting that every photographer's shop is provided with costumes and other theatrical paraphernalia in order that the *p'iao yu* may have his picture taken in the rôle of his favorite character.

Among this class of amateurs the tendency is to be very conservative. When a club is formed the members hire an old and experienced actor who teaches them to sing and to act in the traditional manner. Once a month performances are given at which the amateurs show what they have learned. Frequently, too, these tyros are given opportunities to act at weddings, funerals, or other festivities held in private homes or in restaurants. To belong to such a club is within the reach of even the ordinary clerks, for the dues are about four dollars a year. I have known former members of the diplomatic corps who had spent many years abroad as well as ten-dollar-a-month clerks among the ranks of the amateurs.

When an amateur goes over to the professional

stage the Chinese call it "*hsia hai*", going down to the bottom of the sea, an expression that indicates the low esteem in which the professional actor is held. However, in these days of the Republic, when the social disqualification of the actor counts for very little, and what is more important, a good actor can command the equivalent of a princely income of the days of the Empire, the actor is no longer despised so thoroughly as in former days. Formerly an actor who could read and write was a notable exception, while now occasionally a fairly well-educated man goes on the stage.

I know, for example, a youth of twenty who had been carefully trained by a devout American lady in the Christian way in which he was to go. She had taught him stenography and typing, and Percy, as all Americans called him, worked in an office in a modest but useful capacity. Suddenly rumor had it that he was going to go on the stage and, to be sure, an enterprising manager had offered him about forty times the sum the office was paying him. Many of the pious folk felt grieved when Percy accepted.

Percy's going on the stage was perhaps more of a surprise to some other people than to me, for I had not only seen him perform several times with other amateurs at weddings, but I had also observed him during office hours studying Mei Lan-fang's acting in the Market Theater. One hot summer night I went to a feast where Percy had told me that he was going to play. In the first courtyard of the host's



AMATEUR ACTORS IN AN OLD-STYLE CHINESE PLAY

The face painting of the actor on the right shows him to be a wicked man, probably a robber. The other is the hero of the piece, a young warrior

large residence a score of guests were eating delicious Chinese food and drinking cool beer, while a temporary stage had been erected in the second courtyard. Accompanied by loud music from the orchestra an indifferent play was going on; therefore I set out to find my hero of the evening. I found Percy seated at a table back of the stage busy with his make-up. On his head he was wearing a wig, his eyebrows were penciled, his cheeks rouged, and he was busy painting his eyeballs.

"Good heavens, Percy," I said. "What are you doing to your eyes?"

"I have to put Chinese ink into them to make my pupils large and black."

"Doesn't it hurt like the very Satan?"

"Oh, yes, it hurts pretty badly, but when it's done it looks lovely."

How I wished that Percy's missionary sponsors might have seen the show! As imitator of Mei Lan-fang he played the rôle of the maid, and he certainly looked beautiful. The maid in this particular farce ("Yi Tsai Hua", one of the plays forbidden by the police!) is sent by her mistress—who is minded to improve her husband's absence—to induce a handsome young man to come to the lady's boudoir. But the maid prefers, unlike John Alden, to speak for herself! So she sets about destroying the young man's virtue, while the efforts of the youth to escape her coquettish wiles supply the comic element. It was a bedroom farce, and I noticed with pride the

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effects of Percy's Christian training—he used sheets on his bed!

But in recent years other groups of amateurs have arisen with the definite purpose of reforming the Chinese theater. In 1915 a group of returned students from Japan who had derived their inspiration from modern European dramas they had seen in Tokyo founded a dramatic club in Shanghai called "The Spring Willow Dramatic Society." Their aim was to educate the taste of the public both as regards modern drama and modern staging. They introduced non-musical, spoken drama acted on a stage with footlights and scenery. "La Dame aux Camélias" and "Uncle Tom's Cabin" formed part of their repertoire. But they found only a small following composed of students and people who had been abroad, and therefore this effort was discontinued after one year. Shanghai is the logical spot for such modern theaters—there have been quite a number of others since—because Occidental influence is stronger in this city than anywhere else in China, and the Southerners on the whole are less conservative than the Northerners.

One of the idealists of the "Spring Willow Society", on finding that the audiences were not yet ready for drama in the European style, began to act in the Chinese theater the rôle of the ingénue (*Ch'ing-I* and *Hua-tan*). However, he made the reform of avoiding all plays that taught superstitions and of turning to social plays with a purpose. But this ex-

periment did not succeed very well either, and therefore in 1920 he accepted the position of director of the dramatic club in Nantun, in the province of Kiangsi, endowed by Mr. Chang Chien, one of the wealthiest business men in China. This gentleman believes that the theater is an instrument of great potential force in making over society and that through the proper kind of theater his fellow countrymen can be made honest and patriotic. Nantun is an industrial city and an educational center with ten middle schools and three colleges, and therefore a favorable location for an experimental theater. Moreover, through Mr. Chang Chien's influence, a course in dramatics has been made a part of the curriculum in all the schools, in order that every student may learn to act. The students, Mr. Chang Chien hopes, will spread the message of the modern drama far and wide by giving performances in their native towns and villages.

Such a tour of student actors, from quite another educational center, to be sure, was described to me by one of my students, Mr. Jung Tu-shan. The lad undoubtedly had considerable talent as an actor—I remember particularly a performance of "Maitre Patelin" given at the Peking Union Medical College in which he played the leading part with great success. In the year 1917, thirty-six students, all from the vicinity of Wusih, set out to perform plays in all the villages in the district. They carried with them some painted scenery and each student

supplied his costumes and traveling expenses. The families of different students acted as hosts to the whole company in the various villages visited. Performances were given in the afternoon. In the course of the morning the stage was gotten ready — usually the stage at the village temple. Four coppers admission fee was charged to pay for the cost of transporting the scenery, and the surplus was given to various charitable enterprises. The audiences numbered from two hundred to eight hundred spectators. The plays were propaganda against opium smoking and foot binding or — as this was the time of the patriotic fervor of the students — anti-Japanese agitation. The most popular play was “The Sorrowful Korean”, in which the maltreatment of Koreans by the Japanese was graphically portrayed, together with the warning that the same thing would happen to the Chinese if they did not show more patriotism. After the representation of the pulling out of finger nails or other tortures, the cry of “boycott the Japanese” would arise among the spectators, and those who had had the forethought to provide themselves with Japanese-made umbrellas would start a bonfire with them. Next, everybody would swear never again to buy Japanese goods. At times, too, improvised plays would be given in which the foibles or crimes of certain natives of the village would be castigated. Some professional blackmailers whose machinations were publicly exposed became very angry at the students, but since

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they were sons of wealthy and influential men they could not harm them. It is quite a favorable testimonial for the native ability of the Chinese as actors that such plays could be gotten up at a moment's notice; the method of the students was for one of the members to tell the story in the morning, while in the afternoon those who had been awarded the various parts would act it out. Mr. Jung Tu-shan is of the opinion that for his illiterate countrymen such performances are of vast educational value, especially since newspapers are few and travel is rather restricted.

It would lead too far afield to enumerate even a small number of the professional companies and student clubs now presenting "modern drama", i.e. drama in imitation of the present-day drama of the West. Moreover most of these undertakings are very short-lived. The professional companies are generally found in Shanghai where many a modern European or American drama has been presented for better or for worse. The best work among the student dramatic clubs has been done by the one at Nankai College, Tientsin. In the *Quarterly* of that institution many plays have been published dealing with Chinese life in imitation of the manner of Ibsen, Tolstoy, Shaw, and other moderns. One play from this school, "The New Mayor", was singled out for particular praise by a revolutionary critic, because it overthrew one of the ancient traditions of the Chinese drama—the villain is not punished at

the end of the play. This play too is quite realistic and "peculiarly" Chinese.

Mr. Tsao, the mayor of a village, together with three other unscrupulous men, agrees to sell to a European company the land around the village temple on which are situated the huts of many poor people. The agents of the foreign company begin to drive off the poor people and cause untold suffering among them. At this point a nephew of the mayor appears on the scene. He has been studying in a "modern" school in Shanghai and has acquired some conceptions of honesty and pity. He takes the matter of the illegal sale to court and when he appears followed by a mob of the poor the court annuls the contract of sale. There is even some talk of punishing the four guilty scoundrels. In this crisis the son of the mayor rushes to one of the three other villains, named Hou, in order to plan for his father's safety. Mr. Hou tells him that the only thing to do is to bring him \$4000 for bribes, with which he says he can save the situation. The family of the mayor sell all their property in order to raise this large sum, so that only the hope of future extortions stands between them and absolute poverty. After what has passed the mayor is forced to resign, but Mr. Hou promises to do all he can to influence the election to the effect that the son succeed his father as mayor and the office remain in the family. With this understanding the mayor's family pay out the \$4000. But when

the votes are counted it is found that the new mayor is none other than Mr. Hou!

It may be worth while briefly to summarize the views of two critics on how to reform the Chinese theater. Professor Soong Tsung-faung of the National University, Peking, for many years a student in France, Germany and Switzerland, in his book "*La Littérature Chinoise Contemporaine*" makes suggestions as follows: 1. Music and drama should be separated, performances of operas and plays should be made as distinct genres; 2. An approach should be made to the Aristotelian unities; 3. The false morality of the stage should be replaced by a realistic presentation of life; 4. More attention should be paid to effective dialogue; 5. Male and female rôles should be played by actors of the two sexes respectively; 6. The stage and auditorium of the Chinese theater should be reformed to resemble that of the modern European theater.

"Europeanize the theater" is, in short, what Professor Soong suggests. Much the same thing, from a somewhat different angle, is said by Doctor Hu Shih, professor of philosophy in the same university. He argues that literature is constantly changing and that such a change is a gradual progress from low origins to classical perfection. The history of Chinese drama represents a continuous struggle against formal restrictions which have been gradually overcome. But in the course of this advance useless survivals remained intact owing to

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the conservatism of the Chinese. As such survivals he mentions ballad singing, military plays (acrobatics), a conventional manner of walking on the stage, facial painting in a highly unnatural manner, use of falsetto speech, and musical accompaniment. These ought to be eliminated, just as the chorus, the mask, and the aside have long gone out of style in the Western theater. Furthermore, since progress in literature generally comes about through contact with foreign literatures (he quotes here the influence of Ibsen on the English stage), China ought to learn from the Occidental drama. Two things especially China is in need of: first, the conception of tragedy to take the place of the eternal happy ending; and second, a conception of dramatic economy.

This same critic has himself written a play, which he modestly calls a farce. It has been acted very successfully by student dramatic societies in Peking and other cities. Doctor Hu Shih does not pride himself particularly on this effort of his, yet, in my opinion, it is by far the best "modern" play written by a Chinese under the influence of the Western drama, including some published in American magazines. I shall reprint it here as an index, showing the direction the Chinese drama of the future may take. The influence of Mei Lan-fang, as Professor Soong notes in his book, is in the direction of art for art's sake, while the drama of the students and reformers is the play with a purpose.



HU SHIH

Doctor of Philosophy, Columbia University. Professor of Philosophy, National University, Peking. Author of first critical history of Chinese philosophy, giving a new evaluation of the ancient sages. Editor, poet, and author of play reprinted in chapter five. His most important work was his campaign for the introduction of the vernacular in place of the dead language of the scholars, a reform that will be of inestimable consequence in democratizing knowledge among China's four hundred million

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THE GREATEST EVENT IN LIFE

A Farce in One Act by Doctor Hu Shih

CHARACTERS — Mr. Tien, a gentleman and scholar.

Mrs. Tien, his wife.

Miss Tien Ah-may, their daughter.

Lee Fuh, their old servant.

A fortune-teller (blind).

SCENE — *A parlor in Mr. Tien's home. A door on the right leading to the hall; a door on the left leading to the dining room. Sofa at the back end. Armchairs. A round table in the center with flower-vase and writing materials on it. Two chairs beside the table. A writing desk at the left side of the stage.*

On the walls are hanging rolls of Chinese painting and writing, together with framed Dutch landscapes, bespeaking the complexity of taste in a partially modernized Chinese family.

As the curtain slowly goes up, there is heard the voice of the fortune-teller, who is seated by the table, and the final notes of his accompanying string instrument are still audible. Mrs. Tien is seated on one of the armchairs.

MRS. TIEN — I don't quite understand what you say. Tell me, what do you think of this match.

FORTUNE-TELLER — I only speak the truth, Mrs. Tien. We all speak the truth. You see —

MRS. TIEN — But what is the truth?

FORTUNE-TELLER — I am sorry to say that this match is undesirable. It would be a very unhappy marriage if your daughter should marry this young man.

MRS. TIEN — Why so?

FORTUNE-TELLER — Well, you see, I only speak the truth. This young man was born in the year of the Tiger and your daughter was born in the year of the Rabbit. In the books of fortune-telling, this is called "conquering the rabbit by the tiger."

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The wife would live in constant fear of being swallowed up. And, as the conquest is complete, the wife will probably die long before her husband. I have examined the Month and the Day and the Hour, and found no way to escape it. Of course I am only telling the truth: please don't blame my frankness.

MRS. TIEN—Not at all. I like truth spoken in frankness. I know what you said is true. For the Goddess of Mercy said the same thing yesterday.

FORTUNE-TELLER—So the Goddess of Mercy also disapproved of this union?

MRS. TIEN—Yes, she said that this couple, if married, will not live long together.

FORTUNE-TELLER—That's exactly what I said.

MRS. TIEN—What the Goddess said must be true. But you see, this is a very important matter; it is the greatest event in my daughter's life. We parents cannot take too much care in selecting the best possible mates for our children. So, having known the Goddess's opinion, I sent for you to see if there is any possible escape. You know the words of the gods are always very brief: one may not be sure of their exact meaning.

FORTUNE-TELLER—Quite so, quite so.

MRS. TIEN—I am glad that you have confirmed the Goddess's judgment. (*Rises and hands him some money*) Thank you; here is your pay.

FORTUNE-TELLER—(*Groping for the money*) No, no, that is not necessary. Thanks, thanks. I am glad that the Goddess has confirmed my truth. (*Rises*)

MRS. TIEN—Lee Fuh! (*Enter Lee Fuh from the right-hand door*) Show him out. (*The fortune-teller goes out led by Lee Fuh*)

MRS. TIEN—(*Taking up the red paper on which are written the dates of the young couple, folds it and puts it back into a drawer of the writing desk*) It's a pity!—it's a pity!—

(*Miss Ah-may Tien enters by the right-hand door. She is a young woman of about twenty-four, tastefully dressed and wearing a rather anxious look on her face*)

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MISS TIEN — Mother, are you consulting fortune-tellers again? I met one at the gate. Have you forgotten that father had forbidden fortune-telling in our house?

MRS. TIEN — Just once more, my dear.

MISS TIEN — But you have promised father never to call fortune-tellers into our house.

MRS. TIEN — I know that. But you see I can't help doing it just once more. I have sent for him to see if you and Mr. Chen —

MISS TIEN — Oh, Oh! —

MRS. TIEN — You see this is the greatest event in your life, and you are my only child. I can't let you marry a man with whom you can't live long.

MISS TIEN — But we *can*!

MRS. TIEN — No, you can't. The fortune-teller says so.

MISS TIEN — What does he know about us?

MRS. TIEN — And the Goddess of Mercy says so, too.

MISS TIEN — So you have asked the Goddess too? What would father say to this?

MRS. TIEN — I know your father would object to this, as he always objects to everything I do. But how can we old folks decide a matter which concerns your entire life? We are liable to make grave mistakes. But the gods cannot deceive us. Moreover, the fortune-teller has confirmed what the goddess said. (*Going to the desk and opening the drawer*) Let me show you what the goddess said.

MISS TIEN — Oh, no! I don't want to see it!

MRS. TIEN — (*Closing the door reluctantly*) My dear, don't be too obstinate. I like your young man whom you have known during your stay in Japan. He seems to be a fine fellow. You say you know him well. But you are young and inexperienced. Even we old folks dare not trust our own judgment in such important matters. That's why I went to the Goddess of Mercy and sent for the fortune-teller. They both said that this match would be undesirable. It must be true. The fortune-teller said that this is a case of conquering the rabbit by the tiger, because you were born in the year of —

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MISS TIEN — Please don't say any more of it. (*Sobbing*) I don't want to hear it. I know father will not agree with you. I know he will not.

MRS. TIEN — I will tell him what I have done. He must not give away my daughter against my wish. (*Approaching her daughter and trying to dry her tears with a handkerchief*) Now, don't cry. I'll leave you to think it over. Your father will be back soon; I go to see if dinner is ready. Be a good child and cry no more. (*Goes by the door leading to the dining room.*)

A pause. As Miss Tien looks up, Lee Fuh appears at the door. She beckons him to come near)

MISS TIEN — Lee Fuh, I need your help. (*Lee Fuh bows amicably*) My mother does not want to let me marry Mr. Chen.

LEE FUH — It's a pity, a great pity. He is such a fine gentleman. He even bowed to me when I met him this morning at the street corner.

MISS TIEN — Yes, he saw you bring in the fortune-teller and he was afraid of any sudden change. So he telephoned to me at the school and followed me back in his motor-car. He may still be waiting at the street corner. Go and tell him that my mother has made up her mind not to let us marry. Of course father will help us. Tell Mr. Chen to move his car to the next street and wait for further news. Go quickly. (*Lee Fuh bows to go*) Come back. Tell him—tell him—not to be anxious. (*Lee Fuh bows smilingly and goes by the right-hand door*)

MISS TIEN — (*Goes to the desk and opens the drawer; looks at its contents without taking it out. Then looks at her watch*) Father ought to be back now; it is almost twelve. (*Mr. Tien, a man of about fifty, enters by the right-hand door*)

MISS TIEN — (*Quickly closes the drawer and rises to meet him*) Oh, father, you are back! Mother was—(*hesitates*) mother has something to say to you,—something very important.

MR. TIEN — What's that? Tell me first what it is.

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MISS TIEN—Mother will tell you. (*Runs to the dining-room door and calls*) Mother, mother, father is back.

MR. TIEN—What's in this now? (*Sits down in the armchair. Mrs. Tien enters*) Ah-may told me that you have something very important to say to me.

MRS. TIEN—Yes, something very important. Now don't contradict me. (*Sitting down by the table*) It is about Mr. Chen's proposal to marry Ah-may.

MR. TIEN—Yes, I have been thinking about it too.

MRS. TIEN—Good, we all ought to be thinking about it. It is the greatest event in her life. I was simply over-awed at the idea of its importance. It is true that Ah-may has known this young man for some years during their stay in Japan. But we don't know him. How can we be sure of his character? He is wealthy, but many wealthy young men are simply awful. He is well-educated, but I have heard many returned students abandon their wives.

MR. TIEN—What are you driving at?

MRS. TIEN—My point is this. We should not trust our own poor judgments. At least I can't, I dare not trust myself in this matter. So I went yesterday to the Temple of the Goddess of Mercy.

MR. TIEN—What! Have you forgotten what you promised me?

MRS. TIEN—I can't help it. I did it merely for the sake of our daughter.

MR. TIEN—Pooh, pooh! Go on.

MRS. TIEN—I went there and asked for a Divine Stick. It says that this match is undesirable. Let me show you the poem on the Stick. (*Going to the desk*)

MR. TIEN—Pooh, pooh! I don't want to see it. I'll have nothing of this stuff! If you don't trust yourself, how can you trust such an important matter to wooden images and clay idols?

MISS TIEN—(*Cheering up*) I know father doesn't believe in all this. (*Going to him*) Thank you, father. We should trust our own judgment, should we not?

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MRS. TIEN — But it isn't the Goddess alone that says no.

MR. TIEN — Who else then?

MRS. TIEN — I still had my doubts, so I sent for the best fortune-teller in this city.

MR. TIEN — Ahem! You have broken another promise to me.

MRS. TIEN — I know it, but you see this is the greatest event in Ah-may's life, and I want to clear up every little doubt in my mind.

MR. TIEN — But, for heaven's sake, why did you create the doubt by going to the Goddess? Why didn't you come to me?

MRS. TIEN — Don't be blasphemous. Well, the fortune-teller said exactly the same thing as the Goddess of Mercy. Wasn't that wonderful?

MR. TIEN — Oh, come. Don't be foolish. You have no confidence in your own eyes, so you go and put complete confidence in those who have no eyes at all!

MISS TIEN — I quite agree with you, father. I knew you would be on our side.

MRS. TIEN — (*To her daughter*) How dare you talk in that manner about your own marriage? "Our" side? Whose side is "our" side? For shame! You all conspire against me! (*Putting her face into her handkerchief and sobbing*) Have I no right to decide my own daughter's greatest event in life?

MR. TIEN — Just because this is our daughter's greatest event in life, we must go about it in a sane and intelligent manner. We must not be deceived by wooden images and clay idols,—and blind fortune-tellers. Am I not right, Ah-may?

MISS TIEN — You are quite right, father. I knew you would not believe in all this.

MR. TIEN — Now, let us talk seriously. (*To Mrs. Tien*) Don't cry. No more childish superstitions! (*To Miss Tien*) Sit down and we'll have a serious talk. (*She seats herself on the sofa. A pause*)

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MR. TIEN — Ah-may, I don't want you to marry Mr. Chen.

MISS TIEN — (*Greatly agitated*) Oh, father, you don't mean it!

MR. TIEN — Yes, I do mean it. This union is impossible. I am sorry.

MISS TIEN — Have you found anything against him?

MR. TIEN — No, I like him very much. I could not possibly choose a better son-in-law. So much the more I am sorry.

MISS TIEN — (*Puzzled and grieved*) And you don't believe in the gods and fortune-tellers?

MR. TIEN — Oh, no.

MRS. TIEN AND MISS TIEN — (*At the same time*) What is it then?

MR. TIEN — (*To Miss Tien*) My child, you have been abroad for so long that you have forgotten our own custom and etiquette. You have even forgotten the law of our ancestors.

MISS TIEN — What is the law of our ancestors that forbids our marriage?

MR. TIEN — Let me show you. (*Goes out by the dining-room door*)

MRS. TIEN — What could it be? But I am glad that he is opposed to this union.

MISS TIEN — (*Reflecting, then suddenly showing determination*) I know what to do.

MR. TIEN — (*Enters with a set of big folio volumes*) Here is our genealogy. (*Turning over the leaves*) Look at this long line of our ancestors and see if there has been any marriage between the Chens (陳) and the Tiens (田).

MISS TIEN — Why could n't there be any marriage between the two families?

MR. TIEN — Because it is the custom of the country to forbid intermarriage between persons bearing the same family name.

MISS TIEN — But our family is Tien and Mr. Chen's family name is Chen: we are not of the same family name.

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MR. TIEN—Yes, we are of the same family name. About two thousand five hundred years ago, these two words, Tien and Chen, were pronounced in the same way, and our family name was sometimes written in the form of Chen and sometimes in the form of Tien. As the ages passed by, these two words came to be pronounced quite differently, and the two branches of our family had all the appearances of a separate origin. But the philologists know it, and our family records show that the two families have sprung from one and the same stock. The law of both the Chen family and the Tien family forbids intermarriage between them.

MISS TIEN—Does this prohibition apply to persons whose relationship dates back two thousand five hundred years?

MR. TIEN—Unfortunately it does.

MISS TIEN—Oh, father, surely you don't believe in the reasonableness of such a custom.

MR. TIEN—I don't, but society does and the old scholars do. A story was told of a peasant woman of the Tien family who married a Mr. Chen by mistake. But after her death, she was not allowed to occupy a seat in the ancestral temple until her name was changed into Shen (申) by prolonging the middle stroke of the word Tien (田).

MISS TIEN—I am willing to prolong the middle stroke of my family name, if that is the only objection.

MR. TIEN—You are willing, but I am not. I don't want to be criticized by the old scholars of our clan on your account.

MISS TIEN—(*Sobbing*) But we are *not* of the same family!

MR. TIEN—Our genealogy says we *are*, and the old scholars say we *are*. I have consulted a number of scholars on this point, and they all oppose this union. You see, in a matter of such importance, although one must not be deceived by the wooden gods and blind fortune-tellers, one must respect the opinion of old scholars. And then, your young man is from a very wealthy family. I don't want

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people to think that I sold my daughter to a rich man at the cost of sacrificing my family name.

MISS TIEN — (*In despair*) Oh, oh! Father! You have destroyed the idols of superstition, but you bow to the idols of tradition!

MR. TIEN — You are angry with me? Well, I don't blame you. I understand your feelings. (*Lee Fuh enters*)

LEE FUH — Dinner is ready. (*All rise except Miss Tien*)

MR. TIEN — Let us talk it over after dinner. Come, I am hungry. (*Goes into the dining room*)

MRS. TIEN — (*Going to her daughter*) Don't cry now. We all wish for your best. Compose yourself and come to dinner.

MISS TIEN — I don't want dinner.

MRS. TIEN — Don't be obstinate. We'll wait for you. (*Goes into the dining room. Lee Fuh closes the door after her*)

MISS TIEN — (*Looks up and sees Lee Fuh standing*) Is Mr. Chen still waiting in his car?

LEE FUH — (*In a low voice*) Yes, here is a note for you. (*Hands her a note*)

MISS TIEN — (*Reads*) "This concerns us alone. Decide for yourself." (*Repeating the last sentence*) "Decide for yourself." Yes. I must decide for myself. I must! (*To Lee Fuh*) Tell father and mother not to wait for me. I'll join them after dinner. (*Lee Fuh bows knowingly and retires. Miss Tien rises and puts on the cloak which she had taken off when she first entered. Goes to the desk and writes a note which she leaves under the flower vase; then she hurries out by the right-hand door. A pause*)

MRS. TIEN — (*From within*) Ah-may, you must come and have dinner with us. (*Enters*) Where are you? Ah-may!

MR. TIEN — (*From within*) Leave her alone for a while: she is angry with us. (*Enters*) Where is she?

MRS. TIEN — Where is she? She has gone with her cloak on.

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MR. TIEN— (*Seeing the note under the vase, takes it and reads*) "This is the greatest event in my life. I must decide for myself. I am gone with Mr. Chen in his car. Good-by!"

(*Mrs. Tien sinks into the armchair. Mr. Tien rushes to the door and then hesitates. Curtain.*)



CHAPTER SIX

EXTERNAL ASPECTS OF THE CHINESE THEATER

FOREIGNERS in general regard the Chinese theater as noisy, dirty, and dull, and therefore as a most unattractive spot; yet the Chinese must think differently about it, for the houses are always crowded. When still at a great distance from the theater one can hear a horrible racket of drums, cymbals, and screeching string instruments. On entering the building one is struck by the lack in the Chinese of the sense of how to make things attractive, for, just as one enters a Chinese restaurant through a dirty kitchen, so one often enters a theater through the laundry; four or five men are seen in the "foyer" bending over steaming tubs, washing towels, essentials in a Chinese theater the use of which the spectator is soon to learn. On entering one finds the house—which, by the way, is arranged like a beer garden with the spectators seated at little tables—packed to the last seat. But the usher says

nothing about S. R. O. ; he leads you somewhere and as the other spectators seem to telescope you are asked to sit down either at a table or on a bench which has before it a board to hold the teapot and watermelon seeds that arrive the minute you have taken your seat.

As you settle down and look about, you find yourself in the usual kindly, dirty, ill-smelling, smoking, talking, shouting, eating crowd that one finds everywhere in China. Everybody is glad to give the newcomer information or a match ; the inimitable, gentle Peking old men with their pairs of walnuts in their right hands which they roll around to keep their fingers supple for writing Chinese characters, drink tea, and smoke pewter water pipes, smiling the care-free smile that old age has graven on their faces. Waiters are continually walking around, jostling the spectators and shouting the merits of their tobacco, candy, fruit or what not, and depositing teapots and steaming dishes of food wherever they are wanted. The most spectacular thing is the manner in which the towels arrive. One waiter throws them to the other in tightly wrapped bundles, the pitcher standing near the entrance and the catcher near the stage or wherever people need to wipe their hands and faces. In hurling these bundles they show an unflinching aim and in catching they never miss. Even though one of these soggy masses of steaming cloth seems headed straight for your face, you need not dodge, for without fail a waiter's hand will always



A TYPICAL PEKING AUDIENCE WITH THE
INEVITABLE TEAPOTS

From Jacovleff, "Le Théâtre Chinois"

be stretched out to catch it and all that the drama lover will ever suffer is to have a fine mist sprinkled over his face. Needless to say for this he neither expects nor receives any sympathy — not even a passing notice. A great many soldiers — about whom the Chinese says the worst thing he can think of, that they are “rough” — are admitted free, not because the manager is exceedingly patriotic, but because he thinks that discretion is better than having the door kicked in. In the gallery are seated the women, also eating, drinking, smoking and chattering. How much attention does this audience pay to the play? About as much as we do to the music in a restaurant. They don't come for a few hours' excitement, they come to pass the day that hangs heavy on their hands. As one French returned student put it, “In Europe one works during the day and amuses oneself at night; in China one amuses oneself during the day and sleeps at night.”

The returned student finds the Chinese theater very little to his taste, but yet he goes because Chinese social life is so dull that there is nothing better to do. Comforts in our sense are lacking absolutely in these theaters. You sit on stools without backs, your feet rest on stone slabs when the thermometer is hovering about zero and the cold wind is blowing down on Peking from Mongolia; there is absolutely no effort at heating or ventilation — it is Chinese animal heat that keeps the spectators comfortable and in a frame of mind to enjoy the

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performance. Yet these discomforts are felt only by those used to Western standards of life, for nine out of ten who leave the theater after the last villain has been duly punished go to houses that are likewise unheated and have no light, no agreeable company, and of course no play to charm the soul away from reality.

Peking is the real center of Chinese drama, the city that sets the style for the rest of the country so far as native drama is concerned. Innovations of Occidental nature generally have their origin in Shanghai and are adopted later on in Peking; such imitations of Western institutions are, for example, the amusement arcades called in both cities "The New World"; boxes in the theaters in which men and women sit together; and, of course, motion pictures, at first imported from Europe and America, but in recent years manufactured by Chinese firms in China. But as regards the native theater, Shanghai learns from Peking. The language of the theater, in general, is the Peking dialect spoken by actors all over China. Famous actors from Peking regularly visit Shanghai. It is only in Peking and the treaty ports that regular theaters exist. The vast majority of the four hundred million also have their plays, but they are dependent for them on traveling companies, that set up their mat-shed theaters wherever the citizens are willing to pay them for acting. Thus the political capital Peking is also the leading city for Chinese drama.

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The eight hundred thousand residents of Peking have, according to Mr. Gamble's recently published social survey, twenty-two regular theaters and eight mat-shed theaters; that is, portable buildings covered with matting. Furthermore, there are some nine restaurants, provincial halls, and temples where theatrical performances are regularly given. It is customary to mark all big weddings, funerals, banquets, charity events, and other festivities by theatricals for which the services of professionals are engaged or in which the many eager amateurs are given opportunities to appear in public. Most of the large buildings, — temples, guildhalls, palaces, etc. — are equipped with the simple projecting stages, either inside a large hall or out of doors in a courtyard. If you happen to live near a restaurant or a temple you will be able to speak feelingly of the love of the Chinese for theatricals!

The business organization of the Chinese theater is the same as that which obtained in Elizabethan playhouses. Our theater owner-manager of to-day who selects a play, determines the manner in which it is to be staged and played, and then engages actors to do what he pays them for — this enemy of real art and *bête noire* of the theater uplifters can be found neither in Elizabethan England nor in the Chinese theater. In staging and acting the company of players has entire freedom in China, just as it had in London. The theater-owner (quite like the "housekeeper" of Shakespeare's day) engages a

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troupe to play in his theater, but he never dreams of interfering with the actor's art. The Chinese call him the "behind-the-curtain" while the actors are the "before-the-curtain." The former receives thirty per cent. of the income, while seventy per cent. goes to the manager of the company, who then pays the salaries of his actors. Some of these troupes or actors' clubs are of a rather democratic nature, because all the actors belong to their guild. The actors' guild has its special temple just outside the Hata Gate, for the actors are religious folk—much as are the members of most guilds in China.

In this temple the actors worship three deities, or rather deified men. The first of these is Kuan Yu (Yo Fei), the god of war, during his lifetime a great fighter against the Chin Tartars in the course of the twelfth century. There is a well-known play that sets forth the high qualities of this hero. Though he had been dismissed by the emperor as the result of a court intrigue, yet he refused to join the rebels, no matter how tempting the offers they made him, but remained loyal to his emperor. His mother was so pleased at this that she tattooed on his back: "He repays the state with loyalty and integrity." Later on the emperor reinstated him in his high honors and placed his mother's inscription on the banner of the army.¹

The second deity is the T'ang Dynasty emperor mentioned in the first chapter as the traditional

¹ See also pages 91 and 92.

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founder of the theater, T'ang Ming Huang. In his "Pear Garden" school for actors he is said himself to have acted the rôle of the clown. It is for this reason that the clown enjoys special privileges; for example, he is the first one to receive the attention of the make-up artist, while other actors must wait until the clown has had his turn; and he may sit on any actor's box in the greenroom. It is the clown, furthermore, who burns the incense before the idols found in every theater on the rear wall just opposite the stage and in the dressing room. Such a little religious ceremony is carried out before and after every performance to ward off bad luck. Another feature of the theater that impresses us as being typically Chinese is found in the boards placed at the rear of the stage and on the two supporting columns on which are found inscriptions, generally in gilt characters, setting forth the high moral purpose of the stage. In comparing these mottoes with what is being presented on the stage one is often reminded of the saying of the Reverend Arthur Smith, that no one *knows* so well as the Chinese what is fitting and proper.

The third deity is Lin Ming-ju, generally pictured as a little boy. This noble youth was a pupil in the "Pear Garden", and all who were friendly to him made rapid progress in their art. Hence they realized gradually that he was a god. Like other well-known gods he afterwards disappeared in a sudden and miraculous manner. Because the second part

of this god's name is the word for dream, actors never speak of their dreams in the morning.

But religion does not mean to the actors merely the burning of incense or the making of an annual pilgrimage to Miao Feng Shan, two days' journey from Peking. There is a definite tradition that an actor must show filial piety. Whenever he undertakes something out of the ordinary, such as perhaps accepting a contract to act in Shanghai, he must first ask his mother's permission. I asked repeatedly about this custom, and learned not a reason for it, but simply the fact that if an actor did not ask his mother's permission he would be laughed at. Often it is the mother who makes the contract and receives most of the money. Of a certain rising actor it is said that his mother never allows him to act unless he is to receive twenty dollars for each performance.

In the fairly democratic China of the imperial times the son of the poorest man could rise to the position of viceroy of a province by virtue of passing a brilliant literary examination—and if we are to believe Chinese playwrights he often did. However, the actor, together with the son of the prostitute, and one or two other despised classes, was debarred from these examinations. Of course, with the discontinuance of the examinations in 1907 and the establishment of the republic in 1912, these disqualifications dropped away. Socially the position of the actor is improving rapidly nowadays. For

example, in July, 1922, the son of a high official of Shantung Province married the actress Li Feng-yün. Far from being ashamed of her profession, she acted several plays on her wedding day as part of the festivities of the occasion. However, she abandoned her professional career on becoming the wife of this wealthy man. The fact that she was the first wife was the remarkable thing to the Chinese who spoke to me of the event; for that an actress becomes the concubine of a rich official is almost an everyday occurrence in Peking. Progress along such lines is not a unique or surprising thing in China; to mention but one example, coeducation has come into being since 1919, almost overnight, so to speak, with surprisingly little opposition. Actresses were forbidden on Chinese stages during the days of the Manchu Dynasty, but since 1912 their number has increased rapidly so that they are appearing now on eleven stages in Peking. Only in the foreign concessions of such treaty ports as Tientsin and Shanghai do men and women appear together on the stage, however; in Peking, Chinese prudery still forbids this.

There is a current notion that Chinese plays last a week or a lunar month, but as a matter of fact about a dozen plays, or separate acts taken from different plays, are given in one performance. Toward the end of the afternoon's or evening's entertainment the spectator may observe that some long strips of red paper covered with Chinese char-

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acters in black ink are removed from the two side railings of the balcony and others substituted in their place. In this manner the program of the following day is announced. The performances generally last from noon to about six and from seven in the evening until midnight. The best plays with the stars are reserved until the last, while dull, long plays with inferior actors generally begin the program. These poor actors are often retained merely for charity's sake; often, too, famous actors give benefits for their less fortunate colleagues. In Shanghai actors get monthly contracts; but in Peking the minor actors are hired by the day, and some of them must play in several theaters in one afternoon in order to eke out a meager living at about twenty coppers a day.

Men of this type, of course, are hardly more than "supers." Regular actors on the average earn about one dollar a day, while some of a higher grade receive five dollars to ten dollars. To receive twenty-five dollars for a regular performance a man must be quite prominent in the theatrical world. A few stars, like Mei Lan-fang and Yang Hsiao-lo, receive one hundred dollars for each regular performance, and considerably more when they act at banquets or on other special occasions.

The charges in the theaters depend on the type of theater and even more on the actors. Theaters where women or boys appear as actors are lower in price. There is no ticket or money demanded as one

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enters the theater, but the price is collected by the usher when he seats the spectator. In the ordinary theater one can sit at a comfortable table for forty cents or in a box for a dollar and a half. There are two large theaters in Peking built in Occidental style with receding stages, in which the prices are somewhat higher: eighty cents for a first-class seat and nine dollars for a box seating eight persons. When a star is playing, these prices are augmented somewhat. The poorer classes can enjoy theatrical performances for five coppers by going to the matshed theaters. The average seating capacity of a Peking theater is about a thousand, and the average attendance is very near this figure, if not above it.

The course of an actor's training is an extremely hard one. For seven years he is instructed in singing and acrobatics, and then he begins to play in some of the boys' theaters, institutions connected with the training schools for actors. During the longest part of his apprenticeship he receives no wages, he has long hours, menial tasks, and severe taskmasters. Actresses are trained by special private teachers and their courses have not yet become so uniform as have those for the men. The police have very strict regulations to prevent actresses from becoming prostitutes, but according to Mr. Gamble, in some theaters women from the licensed quarter appear, make engagements after giving their acts, and do some other soliciting. The connection be-

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tween the lower-grade theaters and the segregated district is rather close.

In order to give an idea of the different kinds of theaters one encounters in Peking, I can do no better than to describe several typical entertainments from my notes stretching over five years. There is in the Southern City, for example, the Tung Lo Yuan, a fine specimen of the old-style Chinese theater. No women are allowed to visit this theater—not because of immoralities, but simply because the place is conservative. The seats run at right angles to the stage, along tables, showing that people come to hear the music rather than to observe the action on the stage. I paid twenty-four coppers for my seat in the balcony; the usual price in this theater is eighteen coppers, but because Han Hsi-ch'ang was going to act, the price was raised on that particular day. After a series of plays dealing with murders and robberies, in the course of which the audience gloated over the shuddering and weeping of the victims, there came the chief play of the day—a Yuan Dynasty drama revived in this theater.

The play deals with a poor woodcutter and his wife. The hero takes no interest in his humble calling; in fact, he neglects it for the study of literature. Since he does not support his wife, she deserts him for a smith. Finally the husband goes to Peking for the literary examination and passes with honors. When the wife learns that her first husband is to become a mandarin she is filled with joy; she sits

down at a table, falls asleep, and has a wonderful dream. The dream is portrayed just as it would be in our moving pictures; a conventional symbol, a short pause in the action and the tapping of the drum, indicates to the audience that there is going to be a dream, and then the dream action continues in the same way in which the rest of the play had gone on. A number of men—recalling the Wise Men of the East—enter, bringing all manner of silk robes, headdresses, and other rich gifts for the lady. In her dream the faithless wife sees all this; she tries on her robes, shows them off to the neighbors, and glories in her riches. Then she returns to her sleeping position at the table and awakens to find that all had been a dream. In the fourth act the husband returns, dressed in embroidered robes, a prosperous mandarin. He pours a cup of water on the ground, saying that he will take his wife back provided she can gather up the water again. From this play comes the proverbial expression, "Water once spilled cannot be gathered up again", which means, of course, that a wife who has been unfaithful cannot be taken back by the husband.

According to the custom of Chinese theaters only one act was presented; it was the third act, the dream, that I saw. The too-severe strain on the chief actor who must sing very long arias is generally given as the reason why plays are not presented in their entirety. Sometimes when an entire play is presented—this is frequently done at guild-

halls and other private theatricals—three or four actors in turn play the leading rôle. The actor portrayed exceedingly well the wife's emotions of joy, surprise, and pride. He wore a black dress, because this is the conventional color for the poor, although it was made of fine silk instead of the cotton which is actually worn by the masses. In the old-style Chinese music (called *kuan-ch'ang*) the flute is the leading instrument and the strains are melodious and sweet, not at all offensive to the foreigner's ear as is a great deal of the modern music.

One evening I was the guest of Mr. Chang Ziangling, the present Chinese Consul-General in New York, at a performance by Mei Lan-fang in the so-called First Theater, a large playhouse built in European style. The usher took us to two good seats near the stage occupied by two ragamuffins, and asked the latter to give up their seats to us. Mr. Chang then paid him two dollars for two seventy-cent seats and explained that it is a little graft on the part of the ushers to place vagabonds in good seats until people who they know will tip them come to the theater.

The play again was a Yuan drama called "Snow in June"; a play discussed in a previous chapter under the title, "The Sufferings of Tou-E." Mei Lan-fang is introducing many innovations into the manner of producing plays, turning the stage into a veritable riot of colors selected with exquisite taste. The rear of the stage is covered by a curtain painted

with plum blossoms and chrysanthemums in allusion to two of the characters of his name. The executioners, dressed in rich red trousers lined with white, come on the stage leading in their midst the victim wearing a long robe of a delicate shade of light blue. Some of the executioners have their faces painted in vivid reds and blacks; I find that this adds a great deal to the spectacle, even though it is the very opposite of realism. To illustrate the sort of gagging constantly practiced by Chinese actors I might quote what the judge says to the prisoner: "What! One so young as you is accused of having committed a murder? For this you will be beheaded. Let that be a lesson to you not to do it again." Such a feeble joke in the face of the innocent young victim is, of course, just as fitting as many calembours in Shakespeare's tragedies. After the execution snow falls; that is, bits of paper are tossed down from above. All in all the staging of the play is most agreeable and Mei Lan-fang's acting is extremely good.

Quite a different performance can be observed in one of the "new" theaters, a blight which has come to Peking via Shanghai. One evening I went to the one in the "New World", a four-story concrete building, an amusement palace offering for the single admission fee of thirty cents, old-style plays, "new" drama, story-tellers, singsong girls, moving pictures, performances by acrobats, jugglers, and sword-swallowers, restaurants both for foreign and Chinese food, tea room, billiard tables, and bowling

alleys, convex and concave mirrors, and penny slot-machines showing pictures of various sorts. ("A number of these pictures were of rather coarse nature," observes Mr. Sidney Gamble in his "Peking, A Social Survey", "but none of them could be called immoral.") My goal was the "new" theater, namely plays staged in what the Chinese fondly believe to be the manner of the Occidental theaters. Before a very crowded auditorium a play was being performed by actors dressed in European style, or perhaps better, the style of the mail-order-house type of clothing. The play was in spoken Chinese, and no music accompanied the action. Only in the intermissions between the rather short scenes the band from the Boys' Industrial School, sitting in a corner in the rear of the hall, played "John Brown's Body" and other appropriate dirges.

The play dealt with a woman who had lured men into her house in order to have them robbed there by her accomplices. This woman was dressed in a red silk waist and a lavender skirt; she no doubt seemed very Western to the audience, because she wore a corset and allowed the contour of her body to show instead of being bound so as to look flat-chested like the Chinese women. The part, however, was acted by a man who spoke in a high falsetto. There was a great deal of love-making of a kind unknown to the Chinese stage—the men kissed the woman's hand and even put their arms about her. At times the vampire left the stage for a short

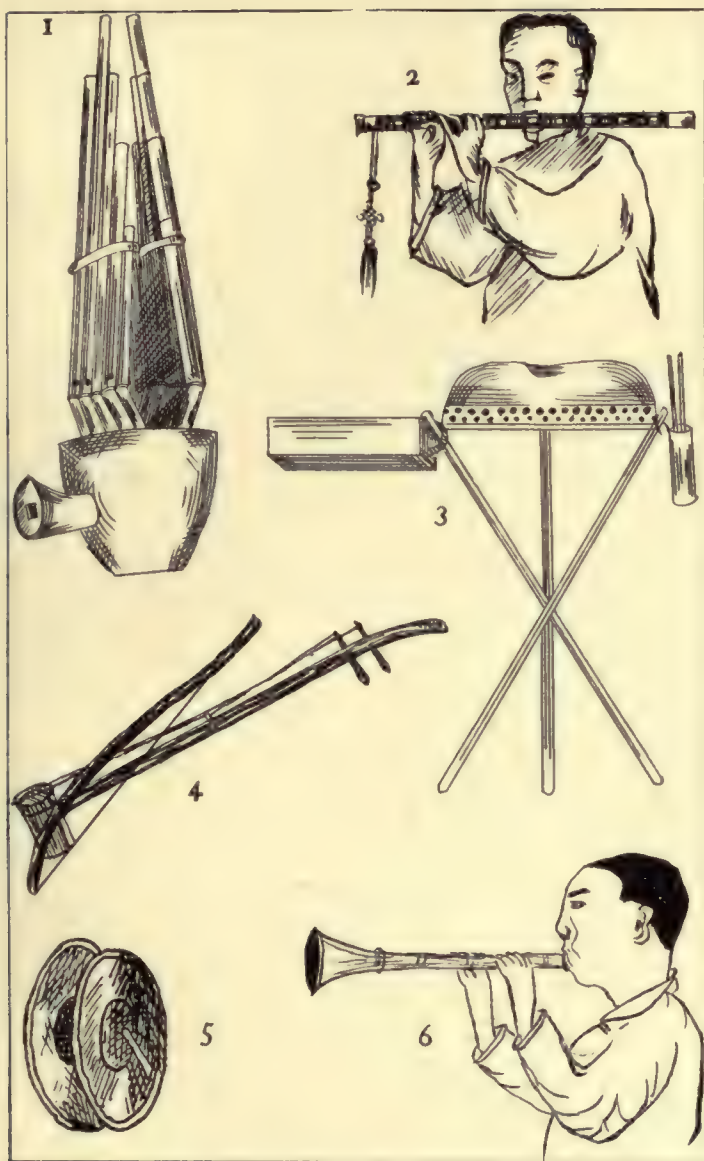
time with one of the victims, in a significant manner. Most applause was accorded the actor who played the ruffian, when he strode "toughly" across the stage with his coat collar turned up and his cap pulled down over his eyes. By way of giving a good imitation of the manners of Europeans the actors, when speaking to the lady, consistently took off their coats, held them on their arms, and displayed brand-new red suspenders! The scenery was changed with every act and showed crude imitations of our painted interiors or street scenes with lamp posts. The play was endless and the action extremely slow. This heart-breaking imitation of our worst melodramas is, I am glad to say, not making the rapid progress it has made in India, where it has driven out completely the native drama, at least in Calcutta and Bombay.

As I have stated above, the Chinese stage lacks scenery almost altogether. Practically the only ornate—and to a certain extent the most realistic—part of the Chinese theater is found in the costumes. In regard to the dress of the actors, historical truth, as has been stated, is observed to a certain extent. The magistrates, the courtiers, the yamen-runners, the merchants, the doctors, the students, the priests, the monks and nuns, the matchmakers, and similar characters appear in appropriate costumes, but usually much more elaborate than they would be in real life. In the troupe of Mei Lan-fang, Peking's most famous actor, the men carrying banners in

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processions are dressed in silk of the same color as the cotton gowns which these ragamuffins wear in the streets of Chinese cities. Honorable personages appear in silk robes in solid colors: purple, yellow, orange, or red. In the dress of common soldiers the spectator finds the styles of the various periods followed with historical accuracy, but the dress of great warriors is fanciful and highly ornamented. These peacocks of the Chinese stage with their feather headdress, their painted faces, and their richly embroidered gowns studded with little mirrors, are the most colorful sights in the theater. Such warriors wear shoes with thick soles, thus adding about three or four inches to their natural height, a touch recalling the *soccus* of the classical theater. The peculiarly slit-eyed expression of the warrior is achieved by binding a strip of silk tightly about the head, pulling up the eyebrows.

A conception of the immense popularity on the Chinese stage of the warrior performing acrobatics signifying tremendous battles can be gained from the Chinese classification of plays. One of the two main divisions is the *wu-hsi* or fighting play, involving very little plot and almost continuous acrobatics or "fighting." The other main division is the *wen-hsi* or civil play, which is practically the same thing we mean by the term drama. In general, the two kinds of plays alternate in the course of the performances so that each division makes up about fifty per cent. of the plays presented. Westerners



ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENTS

1—Shou. 2—Ti-tze. 3—Peng-ku. 4—Hu-ch'in. 5—Ch'a. 6—La-pa

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are frequently surprised that the Chinese do not make the division into comedy and tragedy, but it may be well to recall that even with us this differentiation is a floating conception. Practically all the divisions mentioned in "Hamlet" could be matched on the Chinese stage; historical, comical, tragical, pastoral, and so on. The Chinese have farces called *nao-hsi* (noise plays) and *fen-hsi* (painted, make-up plays), both full of comical and burlesque elements. The only difference between them is, an old Peking resident has observed, that the latter excel the former in obscenity.¹

A cross division of the above classification is found in the distinction drawn between plays according to the style of music employed; *kuan-ch'ü*, *er-huang*, *hsi-p'i*, and *pan-tzu*. Among them only the first mentioned has an appeal to literary men, while the other three are considered fit for the mob only. The *kuan-ch'ü* music is a real Chinese product descended from the classical plays of the Yuan Dynasty. It flourished during the Ming Dynasty, but during the Ch'ing rule it fell into desuetude until at the time of the late Dowager Empress it had entirely passed out of fashion. In the last decades there have been made fairly successful efforts to revive it, especially on the part of Mei Lan-fang. The chief instrument in this style of music is the flute. *Er-huang* and *hsi-p'i* are very similar. Both styles came to Peking from the prov-

¹ See Bibliography, book by Arène, for examples.

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ince of Hupeh at the beginning of the Ch'ing Dynasty, and in both the *hu-ch'in*, a string instrument with a sounding-box played by a bow, gives the characteristic touch to the music. These two styles, together with the *pan-tzu*, are considered rather vulgar music, especially the *pan-tzu*. This latter style came to Peking from the province of Shansi, where the barbarian Mongol blood predominates in the population over the purer Chinese strain. The *hu-ch'in* is also played in *pan-tzu*; but the instrument that gives the name as well as the character to this style is a wooden board held in one hand by a member of the orchestra and beaten with the other to indicate the rhythm. As can be gathered from this fact, the music is very simple and primitive.

In addition to the instruments mentioned above there are various others employed by the orchestra sitting on the stage. On the whole the instruments are practically the same for all kinds of music. They are shown in the accompanying illustrations drawn for me by a Chinese artist. The *hsien-tzu* is a sort of three-stringed banjo, the sounding box of which is covered with a snake skin. The *yüeh-ch'in* (moon guitar) has four strings and a wooden sounding-box. Other wind instruments in addition to the *ti-tzu* (flute) are the *shou*, resembling somewhat a bag-pipe, and the *la-pa*, a brass horn used to announce the entry of great military personages. Instruments of percussion outnumber those of other varieties. The *ch'iao-pan* are two flat boards tied together



ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENTS

1— *Hsien-tze*. 2— *Ku*. 3— *Yüeh-ch'in*. 4— *Chiao-pan* or *pan-tze*. 5— *Lo*

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with a string, used by the leader of the orchestra to indicate the time. The *t'ang-ku* is a brass plate beaten furiously in battle scenes, as are also the *lo* and the *ch'a* (cymbals). The *peng-ku* is a drum made of a solid block of wood which gives piercing, high notes when beaten in a whirlwind tattoo by means of two thin sticks. The *ku* has a leather drumhead and resembles somewhat our kettledrum. It should be noted that the size of the orchestra and the kind of instruments employed vary a great deal. However, the above may serve to give an approximate conception of the Chinese theater music. Just as in much of our own earlier drama, emotional or poetic passages are sung by the actors on the Peking stage.

Another striking similarity to the European medieval theater is the fact that the Chinese stage has its fixed character types. The four most important among these, called the *t'ai chih* or pillars of the stage, are: 1, the *cheng-sheng*; 2, the *wu-sheng*; 3, the *ching-i*; 4, the *hua-tan*. Each company must always have its best actors among these four, because one of them is sure to be the star in the play.

The *cheng-sheng* is an elderly man wearing a long beard. The great actor T'an Shen-peï, who died about five years ago, but whose fame lives on in his many imitators, played this part. It comprises the rôles of emperors, generals, and also old faithful servants, the latter generally characters oppressed by grief. T'an Shen-peï, who became the founder

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of a tradition called the *t'an-p'ai*, was famous for his skill in acting, his fine singing, and his distinct, measured pronunciation. Among his most famous followers are Yü Ssu-yen and T'an Hsiao-sheng, the latter one of his sons. A related type is the *hsiao-sheng*, a youthful civilian or military character, frequently the young scholar who plays the part of the lover. The young military hero is called the *ch'ü-fei-sheng* (wearing pheasant feathers) and the young scholar and lover *shan-tze-sheng* (carrying a fan). Chu Su-yung is the most famous *hsiao-sheng* in Peking at present. He has been nicknamed the "living Chou Yü", after a hero from the ancient tale of "The Three Kingdoms" whom he frequently impersonates upon the stage. Mei Lan-fang has found in the handsome Chang Miao-shang a very satisfactory partner for his romantic plays. This young man, who acts the part of the ardent lover to perfection, has the probably unique distinction among actors of being the product of a Christian missionary school, the Peking Methodist Academy. The Chinese criticize the weakness of his voice and say that his reputation is due only to the fact that he plays opposite the greatest actor of the present day in China.

The *wu-sheng* is the military hero. To impersonate this rôle properly an actor must be very skillful in the art of stage fighting, which means that he must possess great acrobatic skill. He must understand how to fence with wooden stage swords or

spears, and furthermore how to box. Chinese boxing has nothing whatever to do with the blood-thirsty Boxers of 1900, for the latter received their name through a misunderstanding. It is, on the other hand, a most inoffensive art, consisting of a series of poses rapidly and skillfully executed. I believe that formerly it was a method of fighting, but that it has become thoroughly conventionalized at present into a system of posturing and rapid movements.

For a gorgeous riot of color one might recommend a play acted by Yang Hsiao-lou, Peking's most famous actor of military plays, who is beginning to command the same salary as Mei Lan-fang. He is known not only for his ability in fighting, but also because he can sing well and enunciate very clearly. The tourist can tell the home folks that he has seen something if he has watched Yang Hsiao-lou with a face painted in heavy reds and blues, wearing tall feathers on his head, dressed in a garment embroidered in rich colors and studded with little mirrors, mounted on shoes with very thick soles, strutting about the stage in martial attitude, and finally engaging in combat a similarly dressed hero to the end that both whirl about the stage with lightning speed, while the orchestra supplies the excitement by means of a terrific noise which threatens to take the roof off the building. It makes a truly exciting spectacle of which even an untrained Westerner can feel the thrill.

The two types of *ching-i* and *hua-tan* are both young women characters. The difference made between them is that the former represents an honest and simple girl generally playing a sad part in which great emphasis is placed on the singing, while the *hua-tan* represents a woman of doubtful reputation or a maid servant in a comedy part, requiring great skill in acting. It is one of the merits of Mei Lan-fang that he acts both types and thus breaks down one of the stiff rules of the Chinese theater in the interest of developing it into a freer art. Indeed, for over ten years he has been the supreme artist in both types. It is said of him by Peking critics that he sings as beautifully as a nightingale, that he has a pretty face, that he dances gracefully, and that his acting, in the Chinese simile, is like quicksilver which fills up every crevice and crack of a hole into which it is poured—that is to say, satisfying to the last detail. Teh Hing, a man over sixty years old, is another famous *ching-i*; however, he scorns to play the rôle of the *hua-tan*, the flowery maiden who treads the primrose path. Still another type in which Mei Lan-fang appears at times is that of *wu-tan*, or warrior maiden, a rôle comparatively rarely seen.

For some of the best make-ups and the most natural action on the Chinese stage one ought to see men playing the part of *lao-tan*, or old woman. I have frequently found it difficult to believe that it was a man who appeared with the sorrowful, lined



A DEMI-MONDAINE
Chinese Character Type

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face, the black headdress, tottering along with the stiff walk engendered by bound feet, leaning on a tall staff with a carved handle, and all in all giving a perfect representation of a *lao-t' ai-t' ai* (old lady). Very touching bits often appear in plays in which an old woman in her broken voice bewails the loss of a son, her only support in life. Among other minor types are found the *lao-sheng* (old man), the *ta-ching* (male part, either wicked or honest—his character is indicated by the style of face-painting he wears), and the *er-hua-mien* (usually a robber). In addition to these there are an infinite number of other possible parts; for example one sees not infrequently various wild and domestic animals interpreted in very droll make-ups that recall Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream."

A very important type is the *ch'ou*, the clown, as much an institution on the Chinese stage as he was on that of our Middle Ages. It is very difficult, Chinese critics say, to become a famous clown. The part of the clown consists largely of improvisation, but it is quite risky for him to be as funny as he can. He is permitted topical allusions, but he must gauge carefully the mood of the audience. I remember one quite successful hit. In a certain play a husband returns after an absence of ten years and finds his wife and son in good health, but with an added blessing of Heaven in the shape of a one-year-old boy. He berates his wife for her infidelity and exclaims, "Who could have done me such a turn?" At that

moment the clown leaped to the edge of the stage shouting, "It was he!" and allowed his pointing finger to sweep slowly across the sleek, blushing faces of the row of rich merchants in the front seats.

It may seem surprising that I speak so glibly of the "best" actors among the various types, but I should hasten to state that this is a matter in which I do not give my own judgment but the result of popular balloting. A Peking newspaper holds an annual vote for the best actors among each rubric, and the judgment of the readers of this journal is generally accepted among theatergoers. Although the daily papers are an innovation in Peking, perhaps less than twenty years old, yet many of them have their theatrical critics who "puff" actors and more often actresses for other reasons than for art's sake. Press-agenting is far from being an unknown art in the Middle Kingdom. Much of the writing is done by students of the National University who earn a little extra money by this means. The most picturesque among the Peking critics is a Japanese called by his Chinese name, T'ing Hua. For the last twenty years he has devoted himself to the Chinese theater heart and soul, and shows his devotion by adopting orphans whom he gives a schooling as actors. T'ing Hua has over twenty such "sons", one of whom is becoming very famous, especially in the *Shun T'ien Shih Pao*, the paper for which father writes. Yet in spite of all touting the vote reflects

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the popular feeling, especially as regards Mei Lan-fang and Yang Hsiao-lou, the most famous interpreters of the rôles of young girl and military hero respectively.

Theaters on a commercial basis are also practically a new thing in China; that is to say something that has developed on a large scale only within the last twenty years. Before that time theatrical performances were given mostly at temples or harvest festivals, at the houses of rich men, and, most elaborately, at the imperial court. As a sign of the times I should like to quote an item clipped from the *Peking Daily News* of June 28, 1922. The article tells of a meeting of the representatives of Peking's five thousand blind men held in a temple. The end of the paragraph I shall quote verbatim in the English of the Chinese translator:

Among the business matters discussed was the organization of a blind man's association for the purpose of carrying on their trade effectively. The usual crafts of the blind men in Peking are singing and fortune telling, but conditions have gradually changed, whereby theaters are established everywhere, popular education has paralyzed superstition, so now their crafts are generally getting out of date, and thereby need reformation.

But the Peking police force, perhaps the best in the world, has drawn up full regulations, which are adequate for preserving order in the playhouses that have multiplied so rapidly in the capital. Each company must be registered, must pay a tax of five

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dollars for each performance, must reserve certain seats for policemen who keep order, must not crowd extra seats into the aisles, must avoid immoral plays, must submit all new plays to the police, and must apprise the police beforehand of every performance to be held. The ordinance requiring the separation of the sexes in the theater is an Eastern touch that is sure to impress Occidentals — who have forgotten that in Shakespeare's day also women were confined to the gallery. Peking police rules demand that the ushers and tea-venders in the galleries must also be women and that these galleries must have their separate exits. The rule that spectators are forbidden to sit on the stage also recalls Elizabethan manners. One can read in these police regulations:

If the program has been changed and the spectators start a protest by throwing teacups at the actors, these disturbers of the peace must be arrested and conducted to the nearest police station.

There is, however, very little disturbance in the theaters; at least I have never seen the least sign of a fight or quarrel among the spectators. Actors on the stage are forbidden to curse and are fined if they do so. The hours for the performances are fixed from twelve noon to five in winter and spring, and from noon to six in summer and fall, while all evening performances must end at midnight. The latter are an innovation at Peking and are taxed more heavily than the regular daytime performances.

There is also a ruling aimed against "clagues" which forbids too boisterous applause.

On one occasion when I took some New Yorkers to see Mei Lan-fang in the rôle of "Yang Kuei-fei on a Spree", one of my guests exclaimed, "If this play is permitted, I wonder what kind of plays the police forbid!" The obliging Chinese police have supplied me not only with the regulations for theaters, but also with the list of forbidden plays. Naturally enough gross immorality realistically presented is forbidden. There is no question of the display of nudity; it never occurs and, I believe, would hold little appeal for a Chinese audience. Some of the plays forbidden are rather interesting.

There is the "Shang Ting Chi" (Ruse of the Nail). A wife killed her husband because she was in love with another man. The police were unable to learn the cause of the man's sudden death, but the examining magistrate was told by his superior that he must fathom the mystery or be himself beheaded. When he went home sorrowfully to tell his wife of his plight, the latter asked whether he had examined the part of the head covered with hair. The officer hastened to investigate the back of the victim's head and found that a nail had been driven into it. When the superior learned of this he ordered the officer's wife to be arrested. She confessed that she had known of the ruse because she had put her former husband to death by driving a nail into his head and braiding the queue over the wound. Thereupon

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both women were put to death. The play is forbidden lest women learn how to rid themselves of their husbands!

Another forbidden play is "Sha Tze Pao", the story of a young woman who loved a monk. One day her young son discovered them *in flagranti*. The mother feared that the boy would tell of her shame and therefore she killed him. His sister suspected a crime, told the boy's teacher about it, and he in turn reported it to the authorities. As a result, both the woman and the monk were put to death. The play is based on an actual incident that happened in the province of Hunan about forty years ago. The sister, later in life, at one time visited a theater where this very play was being staged and received a shock comparable to the one an honest son of a famous murderer might receive if he went to visit Madame Tussaud's Waxworks and suddenly beheld his own father reënacting his crime in wax. The Chinese authorities forbid the play because the killing of the child by the mother is realistically acted out. The mother's face is covered with blood as she cuts the body into many pieces and places them in a wine vat. It is a curious thing that on the Chinese stage where fixed conventions leave so much to the imagination one finds occasionally the most revolting realism in plays of the "shuddering" variety. I have seen, for example, the victim of an assault dragging his entrails across the stage—a nauseating imitation of the real thing. The

Chinese love their "horrors" just as much as our medieval ancestors did.

It is a custom on the Chinese stage to play on the occasion of various seasonal festivals pieces pertaining to the holiday in question. The best known of the seasonal plays is perhaps the "Ta Yin Ho" (Crossing the Milky Way), played on the seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar, that is to say, generally some time during our month of July. This story is an old legend, varying somewhat in different versions, related in the quotation from William Stanton in Chapter One, where Yang Kuei-fei in the T'ang Dynasty makes allusion to it. It can be seen on a number of stages in Peking at the time of this festival, and is staged in an especially colorful manner by Mei Lan-fang.

The same actor plays another mythological fancy on the occasion of the mid-autumn festival, "Ch'ang-O Pin Yüeh" (Ch'ang-O's Flight to the Moon).¹ This custom of seasonal plays shows a very close connection existing between the popular beliefs and the theater which recalls in a manner the medieval mysteries of the Easter and Christmas seasons. The fact that some of the plays have been written within recent years only indicates that the Chinese theater is in no way declining as a typical Chinese institution, as is, for example, the popular theater of India. What the visitor sees in the native theaters of Calcutta or Bombay, as has been stated

¹ See outline, page 105.

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above, is a diluted imitation of our weakest and worst melodrama with all its mannerisms. In contrast to this the Chinese theater of Peking is continuing as a living popular art, introducing some external features from our stage, but on the whole remaining true to its own genius.



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CONVENTIONS

o the average Occidental the Chinese stage appears a very queer institution with ridiculous customs. This is due largely to the fact that in the Chinese make-believe world the conventions differ from those employed by us on the stages where we mock life. We accept our own stage conventions as something so natural that habit permits us to forget the strangeness of the devices employed. How many Americans among those who have been under the spell of the realistic action of "The Bat" have thought of the fact that the characters were at all times moving about in rooms with only three walls, that darkness was symbolized by lights carried by the actors, that the attic in the country home of the astute spinster was lighted by footlights, and that an actor who had been killed appeared a moment later for a curtain call? And if in a play that has been pushed approximately to the extreme of realism, an unsophisticated rustic on his first visit to

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New York might discover the above-mentioned ridiculous customs, what might his comments be on the fact that Mephistopheles sings melodiously in encouraging Faust to fight for his life, that stage whispers are heard by every one in the house except the one person most in need of hearing them, that a flimsy canvas door can shut out a stout villain, or that the last words of a dying man reach to the very highest seat in the top gallery?

Thus it would seem that any one who laughs at the conventions of the Chinese stage simply displays his provincialism. Our forefathers tolerated almost the identical conventions on the medieval stage, as I have shown at length in Chapter Nine. Moreover, it is a very striking fact that there is in many of our theaters at present an extreme reaction against a minute and pedantic imitation on the stage of the realities of everyday life. Because it is felt that too much attention to external things deadens the imagination of the spectators, stage managers of to-day are beginning to prefer once more a conventional presentation.

As a Westerner learns to recognize the conventions of the Chinese stage he quickly becomes used to them, and soon he is as little disturbed by the make-believe of the Oriental theater as he had been before by that of the Occidental. He is then ready to appreciate the art of the Chinese actor, which runs the gamut of human emotions quite as fully as that of the great actors of the West. He must

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know, however, that the rug on the floor of the projecting, curtainless stage is a magic carpet which carries the actors without change of scenery from Mongolia to Tibet, from the market place to the audience hall in the palace, or from the forest to the prison by the simple device on the actor's part of walking once or twice about the stage or of exiting and reappearing immediately afterward. The stage has two doors; the one at the spectators' left is generally used for entrances and the one at the right for exits. However, at times the door at the left is also used for exits, if the actor wishes to indicate that he is not leaving the house or is otherwise remaining in the immediate vicinity. The crossing of a doorsill is presented by raising the feet about eight inches off the floor in making the steps. To open or close a door the actor raises both hands and makes the pantomime of drawing a bolt and moving a door. Slow steps in which the feet are raised well off the floor show that the actor is walking up a stairway. When a general ascends a hill to review a battle he mounts on a chair or table. If a mountain is to be crossed, a similar pantomime is performed. That a man is on horseback is shown by the fact that he carries a riding whip. When he mounts he takes the whip and raises one leg in a movement intended to imitate the action of leaping into the saddle, and when he dismounts he hands the whip to an attendant with a similarly appropriate movement. When the groom leads off the

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horse he pulls after him the seemingly refractory whip. Sometimes these actions attain a touch of realism, but generally they are—in better taste—confined to quite conventionalized movements. Frequently they escape the newcomer entirely.

A mandarin arriving in a chair walks on the stage surrounded by four attendants, who make a stooping movement such as chair-bearers might make by way of setting down the imaginary palanquin. A lady traveling in a carriage carries with the aid of a servant two pieces of canvas about three feet square, on each of which is painted a wheel; the squares of cloth are supported on bamboo rods, the lady holding the rear ends and the servant the front ends of the rods as they walk across the stage. When she descends she makes an appropriate movement, while the servant folds up and carries off the two painted wheels. Characters who wish to show that they are riding in a boat indicate this by carrying oars with which they paddle in the air. If some one is to enter the boat an oar is stretched out, the new arrival grips it and takes a long step, as though he were boarding a vessel. A man committing suicide by drowning performs a leap as though he were jumping into a well and then quickly runs off the stage. Some commit suicide by throwing themselves down from a wall, indicating this by leaping off a table or a chair placed on top of a table, at times falling on their backs in a manner that requires great acrobatic skill. However, many of the somer-



THE ACTRESS KIN FENG-KUI IN A MALE RÔLE

The long feathers and the headdress mark the warrior, while the riding-whip signifies that the general is on horseback

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saults and similar feats performed on the stage are simply ornamental, with no symbolic significance whatever.

Stage fighting has been developed in China into an intricate art with many cut-and-dried conventions and a minimum of realism. The warriors fly at one another, but they never hit with their swords or spears. The art consists simply in making quick passes at the opponent, whirling about rapidly, throwing a weapon into the air and catching it again, or spinning a spear about much as a drum major does his baton. All the while the orchestra is playing wild and loud music, the kind that Thomas Moore's Mr. Fudge would call the music of the spears, for every tone seems to go right through you. As neither of the contestants is wounded or falls down, the spectator learns the issue of the battle from the fact that the defeated warrior exits first, while his victorious opponent makes a sort of bow to the audience and then struts off with a dignified step. Sometimes a spear is thrown at a soldier who catches it and sinks to the ground clutching it to his breast, denoting that he has been pierced; then he runs off quickly, a dead man. In stage armies one man carrying a banner signifies one thousand men.

The stage in Peking theaters is lighted by daylight or by means of huge arc lamps that illumine the auditorium and the stage alike. Therefore darkness must be indicated by a conventional symbol,

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and the same one is chosen that we have selected in the West, namely, a lighted (sometimes unlighted) candle, lamp, or lantern. It is hardly necessary to recall here that even in our most realistically staged plays the darkness on the stage is only relative and never, except for very brief moments, absolute. The passing of time at night is indicated by the drummer of the orchestra, who beats the hours on his kettledrum while otherwise there is silence on the stage. As the Chinese divide their day into twelve periods of two hours each, this can be done more quickly than would be the case if our divisions of time were used and the entire gesture is fairly inconspicuous.

High military officers can be recognized readily by the four pheasant feathers, sometimes as long as six feet, which form part of their headdress. The Chinese call them "back-protecting feathers", because they are supposed to ward off the blows of the enemy swords. In the same way the painted faces of the warriors can be traced to originally utilitarian purposes; about a thousand years ago a famous Chinese warrior whose scholarly face had a very unmartial appearance painted his face in a gruesome manner in order to inspire fear in the hearts of his enemies.

The manner in which the faces of traditional heroes of war are painted is an attempt at a conventionalized reproduction of the facial expression of these terror-inspiring men as they are described in

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the books of history or in novels. Therefore it is not possible to give a definite color or color scheme for warriors. But in some other respects there is a definite custom. A face painted pure white denotes a wicked person, while no color on the face means a good character. Pure red designates an honest and faithful man, gold a heavenly being, and several colors applied unevenly a robber. The white nose is the mark of the clown. It is interesting to note that in Chinese clown has likewise the three connotations given for the word in Webster's dictionary: rustic, ill-bred, and buffoonish.

Gods and spirits can be recognized by the horsehair switch they carry whenever they appear and by the slight tapping of the gong as they enter the stage. The ghosts of the deceased wear black veils over their heads, or bundles of strips of paper under their right ears. Whenever any character from the world beyond, god or ghost, appears, fireworks are set off by a stage hand; usually this takes the form of large flames emitted repeatedly from an oil lamp. Monks and nuns carry the same horsehair switch, perhaps because of their "spiritual" lives. A bride can be recognized by the red veil she wears on her head. Good officials wear square hats, while wicked officials wear round ones. The wicked jailer in his round hat is a frequent figure on the Chinese stage.

A strong wind is indicated by the waving of flags, which recalls the fact that the flags used in our operatic performances are not made of silk as are

ordinary banners, but of stiff material, giving them the appearance of banners flying in the wind. A snowstorm is produced by flakes of paper tossed into the air by a stage hand in full view of the audience. A sick person is designated by a yellow cloth which covers his face. When a character has died his face is covered with a red cloth. The head of a decapitated person is symbolized by some object about the size of a human head, wrapped in red cloth. Sometimes an execution is portrayed by making a sword thrust at the victim who then runs off the stage, after which his head is brought on.

For new or exceptional situations new symbols must be invented. There is a play called "Chu Fang Ts'ao" taken from the novel "The Three Kingdoms." It is the story of a guest who hears his host sharpening a butcher knife and, as he fears the worst, runs off under somewhat amusing circumstances. However, his host was the very reverse of a robber; he was in fact slaughtering the fatted pig in honor of the visitor. The business of slaughtering the pig is done in the following manner: an actor with a black cloth thrown over his head and back walks on the stage in a stooping posture, driven forward by another actor's stick and making the various deviations from the right path by which a pig in real life exasperates the swineherd. The actor-pig finally walks up to a chair on which he can rest his hands in comfort, while the business of slaughtering is given in pantomime. After this has

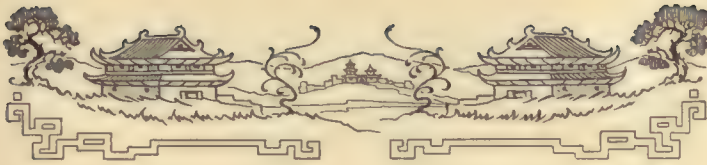
THE CONVENTIONS

been done the cloth is removed and the man, now neither pig nor actor, walks off the stage erect.

The above conventions, which have come under my observation in the course of my attendance in Chinese theaters, do not by any means exhaust the list, nor do they represent anything permanent. Changes are continually occurring. One that I have been observing is that the long conventionalized beards no longer hang down from the upper lip, covering the mouth; probably because this was found to be inconvenient for purposes of speaking or drinking tea, and some one hit upon the idea of having the beard only below the mouth and of painting in the moustache to match. Incidentally, only good characters have a moustache, while the villains of the Chinese stage have no hair on the upper lip. One ought to note, too, that these conventions are not so arbitrary as they might seem at first glance, but are generally founded on some real element in Chinese life. The yellow dress denoting the emperor, the red veil marking the bride, and the black costume signifying the poor man have their basis in everyday Chinese custom. A mourner on the Chinese stage appears in white, and the long beards of old men naturally enough have the same color, both quite as in real life. The symbols are an imitation of real life more or less stiffened into conventions. Of course, the origins of the conventional signs are sometimes a bit difficult to trace, especially in the case of ghosts and gods.

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From the instances cited above it is plain that the Chinese theater contains much that from our point of view tends to "destroy the illusion." Another factor in this process is the "property man"—made known to Americans through "The Yellow Jacket"—who is ever on the stage in the midst of all action. When the heroine must kneel before the judge a coolie in a dirty blue cotton gown rushes forward to place a pillow on the floor lest the actor's costly embroidered gown be soiled. An actor is frequently handed a cup of tea by another such attendant; some actors to-day even equip their servants with thermos bottles for these occasions. A general preparing for combat by removing his outer coat is aided in this operation by ordinary stage hands, not by servants forming part of the *dramatis personae*. From all the above it would seem that human nature does not demand any particular kind of realism on the stage, but is quite able to adapt itself to any illusion whatsoever.



CHAPTER EIGHT

MEI LAN-FANG — CHINA'S GREATEST ACTOR

VERY traveler who comes to China hears of the fame of Mei Lan-fang. He is told that in his visit to Peking he ought not to miss the opportunity of seeing this male actor of female rôles interpret the gay or tragic events of the lives of coy Chinese maidens. When the Chinese Government entertains a distinguished foreign visitor, General Joffre or Secretary of the Navy Denby, for example, Mei Lan-fang gives a performance which forms the *pièce de résistance* of the Oriental splendors shown to the visitor by way of hospitality. Americans who in turn entertain Chinese friends in Peking generally resort also to a play by this actor. In 1919 a group of American bankers paid Mei Lan-fang four thousand dollars (I have the information from the man who wrote out the check) for half an hour of acting and singing; it is true that in this case an especially large price was paid by way of gaining

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that imponderable Oriental asset known as "face", because shortly before this a group of Japanese bankers had tried to impress their Chinese guests by paying Mei Lan-fang one thousand dollars for an evening's entertainment. The common masses among the Chinese also appreciate this actor, and a manager who succeeds in inducing Mei Lan-fang to sign a contract with him is always sure of a crowded house. For five years I have had the opportunity of observing Mei Lan-fang's work and I have come to the conclusion that he justly deserves his fame and his popularity.

Perhaps some who have heard Mei sing in his falsetto voice and have seen him act a "slow" play, or opera, if you will, in the conventionalized Chinese manner, to the accompaniment of a screeching violin and ear-splitting brass cymbals, feel that they would have been willing to pay a good sum to be excused from the performance. There is, to be sure, a long list of martyrs who with lavish Oriental hospitality were treated to interminable sessions of Chinese drama; General Wood, for example, recently suffered two hours of it. I should like to say that in my opinion, keenly as I appreciate the Chinese drama and its interpreter, Mei Lan-fang, I realize fully that it does not present such a finished product as is found in our theater. The Chinese have no great tragedies to place by the side of Shakespeare's; they have no profound comedies such as Molière's; their plays are never so closely knit as are our "well-

made" plays; while in staging they are centuries behind us. The Chinese drama is a case of arrested development; it is childish, medieval, and very trying to our ears. Yet it is typically Chinese. No other art is so popular in China as that of the theater, which presents the old legends of the nation, the famous novels read by the masses, intrigues such as occur on every hand, the music of the various provinces, and the moral ideals of the four hundred millions in general. In fact, the Chinese consider the theater fit for the gods; for whenever they wish to thank their deities or reconcile them, they give theatrical performances for the pleasure of the gods and that of the entire village as well. As Mr. R. F. Johnston remarks in his characteristic manner, designed to shock the ultra-pious, the taste of the gods as regards the drama seems to coincide in a remarkable manner with that of the villagers. Since the theater is in a manner the mirror of the Chinese nation, and is also of intrinsic interest to the student of the drama, it is well worth some attention on the part of any Westerner at all interested in the Orient. Furthermore, because Mei Lan-fang is the most widely known actor, and because he is an extremely intelligent and progressive artist, it is perhaps best to approach this exotic drama through him.

Since Mei Lan-fang is an actor and his ancestors were actors before him, he comes from the lowest class of society. In the otherwise extremely demo-

cratic organization of the Chinese empire, where the poorest boy could rise to wealth and fame by virtue of passing the literary examination in the capital, sons of prostitutes, lictors, and actors, as has been said, were barred from competing for government posts. This system of examinations was abolished in 1907, but the social disqualification was felt by Mei Lan-fang, for he is now just thirty years old. His youth was tainted also by his being subjected to unspeakable immoral practices which were openly tolerated in Peking until the Revolution in 1911. Quite aside from this, the childhood of an actor is no bed of roses in a land where the struggle for existence is so desperate, and ninety per cent. constantly hover near the starvation line. In the Southern City of Peking one meets frequently a long line of boys, with prematurely old faces, ranging from eight to sixteen years, marching along seriously and apathetically under the stern eye of a preceptor—the pupils of an actors' training school. Or if one takes the morning canter along the city wall on the smooth stretch to the south of the Temple of Heaven, one may see the boys at their interminable lessons, which begin at sunrise. They must learn to sing in the shrill, artificial falsetto voice characteristic of the Chinese theater, under a master whose cruel discipline would make Dotheboys Hall seem a pleasant place for week-ends. When there is a sharp wind blowing Peking dust in a gale, the boys are taken to sing against the storm in order that their throats

may become properly hardened. The competition for a livelihood as actor is deadly. Three boys' theaters are training hundreds of boys, while about two thousand actors are already out of work in Peking or are being hired by the day with about twenty coppers' reward for their long hours of labor. In such an environment Mei Lan-fang grew up facing a drab, dismal existence such as the vast majority of Orientals suffer cheerfully.

But Mei Lan-fang's originality and talents brought him to the highest position in his art. He had been trained, because of his slender build, girl-like face, and high voice, to act the type of *hua-tan*, the *hetaera*. This figure appears regularly in Chinese plays in the rôle of servant girl, lady's maid, or demi-mondaine. The method pursued by most tyro actors is to attempt to approximate down to the minutest mannerisms the style of the actor at the top of their special class. Mei Lan-fang, however, decided to copy nature instead. He introduced into his acting female traits and foibles observed in the women about him, and this freshness in his style pleased his audiences. He was gradually accorded more and more prominent parts until twelve years ago he was voted the most popular interpreter of female rôles in the capital. The actors selected as the best "lovers", "warriors", "old men", "old women", and the various other conventional types can count their fortunes as made. After he had been chosen as the most popular actor of female rôles, Mei Lan-

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fang commanded fifty to one hundred dollars for one regular daily performance, and for private performances some such amounts as were mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter. He organized his own company, made a triumphal tour through Japan, and began to fill annual engagements in Shanghai, the "Paris of China" so-called.¹

Let us suppose that in wishing to see Mei Lan-fang you have done as many Pekingese do—sent your servant to the theater to hold a seat for you. Your menial has been enjoying an afternoon's work by grabbing a good seat in the almost empty theater at one o'clock and warming it until five-thirty, at the same time drinking tea, chewing watermelon seeds, smoking cigarettes, gossiping blandly with his neighbors, and occasionally watching the actors on the stage. Now comes the hour for the star, and you, with many sleek Chinese merchants, displace coolies whose figures—in blue cotton—shrink inconspicuously toward the exit. The moment you sit down a waiter with the inevitable teapot is at your elbow, depositing on the table before you a cup containing one grimy thumb. The tea and watermelon seeds are, as they say in the *Moulin Rouge*, "*obligatoire*", but you are free to refuse threescore flies resting on a bar of candy, eggs of uncertain age whose whites have become black, or apples just the proper softness with which to pelt

¹ About a year after the earthquake Tokio's Imperial Theater was reopened, and the Japanese honored Mei Lan-fang by engaging him for this occasion.



In European Dress



Ch'ang-O's Flight to the Moon



Burying the Blossoms



A Young Nun Seeks Love

MEI LAN-FANG



actors. At the tables all around you men are audibly sipping tea or eating dishes of steaming viands, after which they wipe face and hands on hot towels which the waiters are passing. Bundles of towels continually soaring overhead may remind you of bats under the rafters, or if you are medically minded you may exclaim, "Look at them throwing the smallpox around!"

The indifferent actors have been on the stage for hours, impersonating famous emperors of the time of Attila, cunning counselors as old as Alcuin, or sages contemporary with Pope Sylvester. One short play or part of a play after the other — each lasting about thirty to forty-five minutes — has been going on without intermission since noon. The fact that no pause is made between the plays often leads foreigners to believe that Chinese plays are of serpentine length, while in reality they are no longer than the separate numbers of our continuous vaudeville. The orchestra leader merely beats a few short notes on a gong and the stage is set for the next play — that is to say, Chinese drama has no stage settings whatever. A brightly colored curtain forms the background of the bare stage; in other words, the scenery is left to the imagination, as it was in Shakespeare's theater.

When the hour for the star has finally come, a special fluteplayer takes his seat as leader of the orchestra and sends out soft, wistful notes that contrast gratefully with the brass din of the preceding

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battle scene. With tense interest Mei Lan-fang is awaited, for to-day he is to play "A Young Nun Seeks Love."

With light, mincing step he enters in a long nun's gown of white silk, over which he wears a white coat dotted with a diamond pattern in light blue. Long black tresses and a narrow black belt set off the delicate shades of the light colors. The exquisite color combination is enhanced by his soft, clear voice and the emotional play of his facial expression. The theme of the forty-minute monodrama is similar to Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi", a story which Mei alternately sings and recites to orchestral accompaniment.

A pitiful existence is that of the nun with the shaven head! At night only a lone lantern consorts me to sleep. Time quickly pursues one to old age, leaving only the memory of a monotonous youth.

Sent to the convent at a tender age, she finds her life at sixteen a dull round divided between the burning of incense and the reading of monotonous Buddhistic sutras. The abbess has deprived her of the ornament of her hair and forces her to carry water from the well at the foot of the hill. On these excursions she has stolen long looks at a handsome youth playing outside the city gate, and he seems not indifferent toward her.

For the price of a little sympathy I would be willing to go to the palace of Yen Wang, the god of Hell, to be ground up in the mortar, cut into bits by the saw, crushed

between the millstones, or to seethe in burning oil. My love is deep enough to outweigh the punishments of all devils.

Her childhood at the home of her pious parents had been an interminable droning of the sacred syllables, "*O mane padme hum, o mane padme hum*", beating of drums, ringing of bells, blowing of horns, tinkling of cymbals—all to drive away the devils. Her heart, hungry for a bit of brightness, feels cramped in her cell and she decides to enter the large hall filled with the statues of five hundred saints and Buddhas. Since the stage is absolutely bare, Mei at this point goes through the pantomime of opening a door and closing it again behind him. After some quaint meditations before the various ascetic *lohans* and the figure of the "laughing Buddha",¹ who seems to say, "Why waste the precious days of sweet youth?", the young nun decides to risk all for the sake of finding love. In a graceful, rhythmic dance Mei moves off the stage. The young girl has gone into the "black world", as the Buddhist nuns call life outside the convent walls.

Another favorite among Mei Lan-fang's plays is "Burying the Blossoms." A young girl, tormented

¹ This popular figure, called also "big stomach" or "cloth sack" Buddha, is laughing in anticipation of the happiness to come. His image is found in practically all Buddhist temples and frequently among the *bibelots* collected by foreigners. In regard to the taste of collectors, Baron de Staël-Holstein, a Russian scholar versed in Buddhist lore, remarked to me one day, "The ugliest of all these figures is the one most sought after by Westerners."

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by jealousy and doubt of her lover's good faith, finds the garden path covered with fallen blossoms. In these flowers, broken from their stems and lying crushed on the ground, she sees the image of herself, a girl whose parents are dead and who is neglected by every one. She takes pity on the flowers, and, placing them in a silk bag, buries them under a tree. As she is shedding tears over the little mound her lover comes upon her. The explanation that follows effects a deepening of their love.

In Professor Giles' translation ("Chinese Literature", page 368) we have the sentiment of the play expressed (*Cf.* Moore's "The Last Rose of Summer"):

Farewell, dear flowers, forever now,
Thus buried as 't were best,
I have not yet divined when I,
With you shall sink to rest.
I who can bury flowers like this
A laughing-stock shall be;
I cannot say in days to come
What hands shall bury me.
See, how when spring begins to fail
Each opening floweret fades;
So too there is a time of age
And death for beauteous maids;
And when the fleeting spring is gone,
And days of beauty o'er,
Flowers fall, and lovely maidens die,
And both are known no more.

But not only such pale, wistful themes are found in Mei's repertoire. The "Three Pulls"¹ is a tragi-

¹ See page 83ff.



BURYING THE BLOSSOMS

The setting in this amateur production shows more stage properties
than are customary in most Chinese theaters



comedy of bourgeois life where Mei presents a delightfully coquettish wife. This is a four-act play in which a large company appears in gorgeous costumes of embroidered silk studded with the little mirrors characteristic of Chinese stage apparel. The various characters wear historically correct dress, the well-known Manchu robes. But as an example of the extreme incongruities in the mixture of the Oriental and the Occidental now taking place in Peking I should like to mention an incident that occurred when the play was staged for the first time at the Chen Kwang Theater. This new playhouse has a large European stage and various other modern conveniences as yet not fully understood or appreciated by the Chinese, for I observed that the petition written by the husband and later flaunted in court was written on a three-foot strip of toilet paper!

The very best-beloved of Mei Lan-fang's plays is "Yang Kuei-fei Tsui Chou" (Yang Kuei-fei's Spree). Yang Kuei-fei, the famous concubine of the Emperor T'ang Ming-huang, of about 900 A.D., as has been stated, lives on in Chinese poetry as a charming beauty of absolutely bewitching qualities. In connection with this play one ought to say that drunkenness is rare in China and is not considered a vice or a disgrace. On the other hand a genial spree is looked upon as an exploit. A Chinese gentleman will tell you "I was roundly drunk last night", much as an American might beamingly con-

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fide his triumphs at golf. K'ang Hsi, perhaps the greatest emperor China ever had, used to urge his guests to drink heartily, assuring them that if they drank too deep he would have them taken to their homes in a dignified manner.

The plot of the play is a short episode in the imperial palace. Yang Kuei-fei learns from two eunuchs that the emperor is supping with a rival beauty, and in her jealous rage she orders one bumper of wine after the other. As the wine begins to take effect, she performs some charming dances in which other court ladies join, to the end that a beautiful inebriated ballet is performed. The effect of the dancers in the ancient Chinese dress, the style with the long sleeves taken over by the Japanese as the kimono, is much like a vision of fluttering, multi-colored butterflies. Later Yang Kuei-fei, in a low-comedy scene, uses her charms first on one and then on the other of the servants, who prefer to run away rather than be found in a compromising position with the favorite concubine. Finally Yang Kuei-fei leaves the stage alone, singing, "Now lonely I return to the palace."

One specialty of this play is the manner in which Mei Lan-fang drinks the wine. He grips the cup with his teeth and bends backward very slowly until his head touches the ground. Such "stunts" are fairly frequent in Chinese plays and are used just as traditionally as some of the byplay in French masterpieces staged at the Comédie Française. The

great T'an had a very famous trick which no actor has been able to imitate; in the play, "Seeing the Ancestral Portraits", he would kick off his shoe in such a manner that in falling it would always strike exactly on his head. Mei Lan-fang is not stressing these acrobatic and other tricks, but is placing the emphasis on the interpretation of the emotional content of the scenes.

A little farce that Mei presents in a droll manner is the "Ch'ing Shang Lao Shüeh" (Slave Girl Plays Tricks on the Old Schoolmaster). This play presents the perennial theme of the impertinent servant. The make-up of the old scholar in Ming costume is comical to the last degree. The slave girl receives instruction, together with her mistress. When asked to recite she does so with the swaying body motion commonly found in our urchins when they "say their piece." She catches a fly off the teacher's face, and in mixing ink, spits in his eye. When he sets out to beat her, she catches the switch, and as he pulls, lets go, with the result that teacher falls back into his chair and rolls over on the floor with a tremendous crash. After suffering many similar tricks the pedagogue decides to teach in that house no longer. As he leaves the room the audience sees that the slave girl has pinned on his back a picture of a turtle—than which there is no greater insult in all the Middle Kingdom!

This is the only play I have ever seen that makes fun of a scholar. I consider it a pleasant tribute to

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the Chinese sense of humor that it allows them to laugh occasionally, even at the figure of their national hero. The scholar who by virtue of having passed the examination in Peking is made magistrate or even viceroy of a province is the hero of hundreds of Chinese plays. The examination in the capital with the attendant change of fortune in the life of the hero is the *deus ex machina* of the Chinese stage. As an example I shall mention another play of Mei Lan-fang's, the one he played before Secretary of the Navy Denby on July 17, 1922. This play is called "Yü Pei T'ing" (The Pavilion of the Royal Monument). A poor scholar on his way to Peking is caught in a heavy storm and seeks shelter in the pavilion of a royal monument. He finds, however, that a lady has come before him and taken possession of the interior of the small building. Since he is both a scholar and a gentleman, he passes the night on the outside, where the eaves afford him only insufficient shelter from the rain. In the morning the lady thanks him for his consideration, and he continues on his way. The courtesy of the young scholar has made so deep an impression on the lady that she cannot refrain from telling her sister-in-law about it, who in turn tells the lady's husband. The latter thinks that the story is only a disguise for what he believes to have been the true state of affairs, namely that his wife has been unfaithful to him. He therefore divorces his wife and abandons her to a life of misery and disgrace. The scholar,

on the other hand, passes his examination with such distinction that the emperor grants him an audience, in the course of which he asks the young man to tell of the noblest thing he has ever done. The scholar tells of his night spent out in the rain for the sake of an unknown lady. The husband happens to be among the courtiers present, and, upon this corroboration of his wife's story, he takes her back into his home, and all live happy ever afterward!

The scholar's quick change of fortune as a theme in the Chinese theater finds a close rival in the motive of filial piety. Among Mei Lan-fang's plays the latter is best illustrated by the play "Mu Lan", the name of a girl who goes to war in place of her father because the latter is too old to undertake a heavy campaign. It is characteristically Chinese that this Joan of Arc does not fight for motives of patriotism, but out of regard for the comfort of her aged father. This fascinating play gives Mei an opportunity of showing in the first part his skill in portraying a demure young maiden, while in the second part he can display his address in the extremely conventionalized art of Chinese stage fighting.

All of these and many more characters Mei Lan-fang is on the stage, but of his real character very little is known among foreigners in China. It is known that he has a kindly heart, for every year he contributes his services to a dramatic entertainment arranged by American missionaries for the purpose

of providing shelters for the riksha runners during the bitter Peking winters. One reads about it in the papers when he makes his annual pilgrimage to Miao Feng Shan, a mountain temple three days distant from Peking, the traditional shrine where actors worship. But artists eager to paint his portrait have never been able to secure him as a sitter, because he is very shy about entering any society outside his immediate circle. I considered myself very lucky when after some negotiations I secured an interview with him in the typical Chinese fashion through some friends of some friends of his friends. The house in which I called on Mei was *his* house; he keeps two other establishments—one for his wife and the other for his concubine. For many years Mei Lan-fang was known as the faithful husband of one wife, but finally friends prevailed on him to act in the manner of every Chinese gentleman who respects himself and to take a concubine into his domestic circle. Among Mei's friends I met a young actor with eloquent scars on his cheeks; he had been the one who introduced Mei to the concubine and the scars were the result of some acid thrown by a brother of the jealous wife. Another gentleman present was a stocky officer of the Peking *gendarmarie*, a useful friend to the actor, because on several occasions ruffians have attempted to extort blackmail from him by violence—as they do with every one in China who has any money. Mei was the last one to appear, wearing a long white

silk gown, the customary hot-weather dress of the Chinese gentleman.

Some of the coyness that gives such a true ring to his stage presentations of young ladies clings to Mei off-stage. He seems like a charming, bookish, slightly effeminate boy of seventeen. In reality he is thirty, but like so many other Orientals he appears to Westerners much younger than he is. He is of the frail, willowy build demanded in a Chinese beauty, but he is the very opposite of languid, sparkling with vivacity and full of life. His voice is high, gentle, and soft; in fact, it sounds very much like that of one of his heroines on the stage.

All in all Mei gives the impression of a youthful scholar rather than of an actor. There is not the slightest touch of Bohemianism about him. His favorite avocations are music and drawing; opium smoking and other fashionable dissipations hold no charms for him whatever. He is very fond of Western music, and hopes ultimately to win over his audiences to an appreciation of the piano and the violin, which would give him an immensely richer field for his musical repertoire. He has for a close friend and daily companion a learned scholar with whom he makes researches in ancient works dealing with the drama. Instead of following in the beaten path he is intent on improving the drama by presenting ancient plays with a staging historically correct, and by reviving whatever was vital in the past. With great pride he showed me his extensive library,

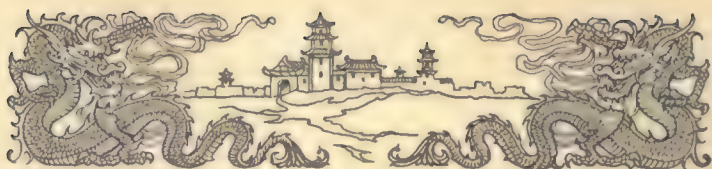
lingering long over a neatly written text of a play copied by his grandfather, who had been musician to the great actor T'an.

To sum up Mei Lan-fang: like most other men who achieve distinction, he is in love with his work and devotes himself to it night and day.

His great merit is that he is bringing good taste and sensible innovations to the Chinese theater, which had been stagnant—in a state of arrested development. The old Empress Dowager, showing her usual bad taste, had made fashionable in Peking a Mongolian style of music intended for open-air theaters on the wind-swept plains, which in a roofed theater is absolutely ear-splitting. Mei Lan-fang is returning to traditional Chinese music in which the soft notes of the flute prevail. Instead of the old hackneyed themes Mei has staged numerous new plays based on the famous romantic novel, "The Dream of the Red Chamber", as well as many other plays written especially for him. Into his fanciful plays of the type of "Midsummer Night's Dream" he has woven graceful dances, an absolute innovation on his part. New and often historically correct costumes appear in his plays, enlivening the otherwise rather drab Chinese stage. In contrast to the Chinese habit of presenting only the favorite acts of the well-known plays (as though our managers should stage only the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet", or the husband-under-the-table scene from "Tartuffe"), he presents even the older plays

in their entirety. When he plays in Japan or in the European theater in Peking, he removes the ill-clothed orchestra from the stage; but he cannot do this in the native theaters, where the strong tradition insists that the musicians must sit on the stage and destroy the illusion, for the foreigners at least.

In this ability of his to make innovations and at the same time to adapt himself to his audiences to a certain extent, lies the key of Mei Lan-fang's success. Even the most hidebound theater devotees and connoisseurs must recognize the skill of his acting and the perfection of his enunciation, and therefore they are willing to accept the foreign elements which he introduces. Mei Lan-fang's greatness lies in the fact that he is able to introduce bold reforms into the theater without cutting himself off from the tradition.



CHAPTER NINE

ANALOGIES BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

 HAVE often met with people who ask: "Do the Chinese have the division of plays into tragedies and comedies?" and when they learn that there is no such division they feel this to be a great defect in the Chinese theater. But it might be well worth recalling that these Greek terms did not originally have their present-day connotations, and that their original meanings were perhaps not far removed from the divisions which the Chinese make in classifying their plays. Tragedy meant originally a "goat song", and philologists are divided on the question as to whether the name is derived from the fact that the song was sung by revelers worshiping Dionysus, who, because of their appearance and licentious character were called "goats", or whether it was sung at the sacrifice of a goat, or whether a goat was the prize which was awarded to the successful poet.¹ At any rate there

¹ See Haigh, "The Tragic Drama of the Greeks", Oxford Uni-
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is no doubt that tragedy was a musical term. The same is true of comedy, which is the song of the *comus*, or band of revelers, who marched along in procession carrying aloft the phallus and chanting songs to Dionysus which were called phallic songs. The scurrilous remarks interlarded in the intervals between songs by the leader of the *comus* gave rise to the form of light entertainment known as comedy in the theater of to-day. In the Middle Ages it had the meaning of a poetic work with a happy ending, for which reason Dante called his long poem a "comedy", which later writers made "The Divine Comedy." Thus we see the two words have deviated altogether from their original meanings. We know very little about Greek music of these earliest days, but we hear also of Doric music and Phrygian music employed in the theater. The Doric music was grave, dignified, and employed the harp as the chief musical instrument, while the Phrygian mode was emotional and was accompanied by the flute.

Now let us look for a moment at the Chinese classification of styles of drama. We generally hear of the divisions of *kuan-ch'ü*, *p'i-huang* (a telescoping of *hsi-pi* and *er-huang*) and thirdly of *pang-tzu*. These are all musical terms. *Kuan-ch'ü* is accompanied by the flute, and is said to be the most literary, the most graceful and soft; also because of

versity Press; Murray, "Ancient Greek Literature", Appleton, etc.—So far as I know no scholar has suggested that the goat did the singing of the "goat songs."

its lack of vulgarity it is caviare to the general. It is rarely performed nowadays, but was quite popular in the Ming Dynasty. It was directly descended from the classical Yuan drama, whose authors were scholars ousted by the Mongols from their public offices. This name is derived from a geographical term, just as are the Greek Doric and Phrygian modes. The *pang-tzu* came to Peking from Shansi during the Ch'ing Dynasty. The chief instrument is a rude kind of fiddle with a round, flat sounding box, and the *genre* is considered to be exciting and vulgar. The *er-huang* or *hsi-p'i* (said to be very similar) are also styles adopted during the Manchu Dynasty. They employ as their chief instrument the well-known *hu-ch'in*. There is a great similarity between Greek and Chinese thought, in that both speak of the good moral effects of music if only there be the proper harmony; and likewise of the immoral effects of vulgar, exciting music. I believe one could find almost exact parallels in the writings of Plato and of many Chinese authors,¹ even so modern a one as Tsai Yuan-pei. We modern Europeans and Americans, on the other hand, seem to have given up the idea of music as a means for developing harmonious and moral souls.

In practice music was employed in the Greek theater not only by the chorus, but also by the actors in the midst of the spoken dialogue when a particularly emotional point was reached. When the pas-

¹ See "Sacred Books of the East", vol. XXVIII, pp. 92-131.

sions rose to a high pitch the musical accompaniment commenced and the actor sang; such a passage was, for example, the recital of the forebodings of Cassandra in Æschylus' "Agamemnon", interrupted by the Argive elders who form the chorus. Exactly the same practice obtains in the Chinese theater, as any one can readily observe in almost any play. Some scholars have asserted that the whole of a Greek play was accompanied by music, but it is generally believed now that only the lyrical passages were sung, while the iambic dialogue was spoken. In this similarity of the Greek and the Chinese theaters we can find an aid in our efforts at reconstructing the past — perhaps worthy of consideration by *régisseurs* who attempt to put on the stage to-day some of the plays which stirred the imagination of the Athenians of old. Possibly it may also be a shock to some who have seen modern representations in which the actors, as well as the chorus, employ a solemn and stately, sometimes monotonous recitative, to learn that the ancients sang or chanted a great part of their plays; a shock such as we are likely to receive when we first learn that the ancients did not employ marble in their architecture in its austere virginal whiteness only, but that they frequently colored their buildings. But just as a traveler coming to China may see beautiful architectural results achieved by the bold use of color in architecture, so he may come closer to the real — not the pseudo-classical — art by reflecting on the

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effect of musical interruptions in Sophocles' "Œdipus" or Euripides' "Medea."

In Greece the theater was an institution which gave performances at the time of certain religious festivals, and it was in this sense a folk theater. In Peking also there are certain plays given always at particular festivals, and dealing always with the supernatural, or if you prefer, with religion. On the first day of the New Year, for example, there is the "Ch'ing Shih Shan", a play dealing with the gods' conquest of the devils; on the fifth day of the New Year comes a play in honor of the god of wealth; on the fifth of the fifth month, a play describing the overcoming of the five dangerous poisons; and on the seventh of the seventh month the "Meeting on the Milky Way." These plays persist in spite of the commercialization of the Peking theaters.

The student of European literature whose field of research lies in the reconstruction of the past can find in China a wonderful source book, for this is a magic land where for Europeans and Americans the clock has been set back several centuries. We can see the Middle Ages enacted before our very eyes, and get in that way a vivid picture of things as they were in the Europe of yesterday. In illustration of this I wish to cite the Chinese theater of to-day, and to offer the suggestion that the Shakespeare scholar who has seen the Peking theaters of the present time

has—if one may use the figure—not only the words, but also the tune, of the Elizabethan drama.

If I take a tourist to the theater his first remark often is that this is just like the Shakespearean theater. And it is indeed not surprising that it should be so, for China to-day is at about the same stage of culture as England was at the beginning of the seventeenth century. There is a court where royal splendor can be seen; the deposed emperor still receives in the Forbidden City the faithful Manchus, who come in gorgeous raiment and with fastidious regard for court etiquette to offer their congratulations on the occasion of his birthday.¹ The ordinary man of means dresses not in the stereotyped manner of our present-day civilization, but follows his taste in the selection of rich purple, wine-colored, or other shades of silk. Sedan chairs are still used as a common means of transportation. Torture is still practiced, and the heads of executed criminals are hung up in the streets in case of a revolution or other great excitement. The servants are typical Dromios in their submissiveness and occasional impertinence. The streets are frequently still the narrow and filthy lanes of medieval times. Most important, there are few factories, and manufacture is done by leisurely home industry. Much of this is passing with the coming of industry, the automobile and the tram car, the Europeanized

¹ This has now come to an end. In October, 1924, the deposed emperor was driven out of his palace by the "Christian" General Feng Yu-hsiang.

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tailor and the moving-picture machine; yet much that is picturesque in Peking continues to flourish, and the theater with its huge community of actors is one of the most conservative elements.

To begin with, the Chinese and the Elizabethan theaters are almost identical in structure, and for much the same reasons. The origin of the sixteenth-century theater in London is to be found in the inn-yard in which a platform had been erected for the performance; and when James Burbage in 1576 built the "Theater" outside the jurisdiction of the City Fathers of London he erected what was practically an innyard without the inn. There was a platform stage projecting into the yard, where the rabble could find standing room, and a gallery in which the wealthier patrons could be seated. The origin of the Chinese theater building, such as it is found in Peking, is very similar. Performances were first given in the courtyards of temples or of the houses of rich men. A platform was erected at one end. The spectators stood in the courtyard or sat at tables. The latter was particularly the case when theaters were held in the private courtyards of princes or other rich men. For centuries theatricals in China were either religious or private, and public theaters which any one may attend for the payment of an admission fee are a fairly recent institution, but when they were built they were constructed on the model of the temple or palace theaters, with a projecting roofed stage at one end, the cheaper seats on the ground

floor and the more expensive ones in the gallery. The Chinese audiences have been trained to regard the stage as anywhere and not as a particular place; it is unlocalized, as in Shakespeare's time. The roof on the stage serves the same purposes as in Elizabethan times; it is a protection for the actors against rain, and a "heaven" from which deities may be lowered.

In distinction to our modern theater in which we present a series of pictures within a frame called the proscenium, which we cover with a curtain while the pictures are being shifted, both the Elizabethan and the Chinese stage have neither a proscenium nor, in general, a curtain. In both the stages is an unframed rostrum thrust bodily forth into the auditorium, surrounded on three sides, if not on four, by spectators. In short it is not a picture stage, but a platform stage. On such a stage there can be, of course, no question of artistic lighting effects; the plays are performed either by daylight, as they were in Shakespeare's day, or by the light of huge arc lamps that illuminate stage and audience alike. As the actors cannot present artistic stage pictures to three sides of the house at the same time, it is not surprising that, as the English literary historians tell us, the appeal was more to the ear than to the eye. That this is equally true in China is seen from the Peking term for a theatrical performance, *t'ing-hsi*, which means a play that is heard. In old Peking theaters the seats on the ground floor are

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arranged at right angles to the stage, along tables on which are served tea and cakes; recently built theatres, however, have their seats (with rails for the inevitable teapots) running parallel to the stage.

In speaking of the chief characteristics that distinguish the Elizabethan from other stages Professor Thorndyke says:¹

The fixed and most important principle was the use of the projecting platform as a sort of neutral, vaguely localized territory, where almost anything might happen. The second principle was the use of the inner stage with its curtains (and to some extent the upper stage) as a means to denote locality more exactly, to employ properties more readily, and to indicate changes of scene more effectively.

From what has been said it is apparent that in regard to the first principle the Chinese and the Shakespearean stage are identical. In regard to the use of the curtain and the inner stage, scholars are very much divided as to the manner and frequency with which they were employed. To quote Professor Thorndyke once more:²

The total evidence of the stage directions alone indicates that the arrangement prescribed was in general use in important theaters, public and private, though doubtless its adoption was gradual and subject to variation. We may suppose that the size and visibility of the inner stage varied in different theaters, and that the extent

¹ Thorndyke, "Shakespeare's Theater", Macmillan Company, page 139.

² *Ib.*, page 87.



THE FORTUNE THEATER



A TYPICAL PEKING THEATER

to which the curtain was used changed from decade to decade, or playwright to playwright, or manager to manager, or even according to the state of the weather and light.

The use of the curtain in Chinese theaters is very rare; and the curtain itself is by no means like the curtain to which we are accustomed. When a relatively elaborate setting is about to be placed on the stage a curtain about ten feet high by about twenty feet wide is carried by stage hands to the front of the stage, and there stretched out to cut off the view of the audience. The ends of the curtain are each sewed to a bamboo pole held upright by two coolies. In this most primitive manner a garden setting or a heavenly throne is made to appear to the audience in one burst of glory instead of being carried on piece by piece, as is the case with most properties and sceneries. The Chinese playhouse has no inner and likewise no upper stage. Curtains about beds or other pieces of furniture are used to "discover" actors in the same manner as was done on the Elizabethan stage. But all of these articles are regularly carried on the stage in full view of the audience. The size of the two stages seems to be about the same, except that the Elizabethan was much wider. The dimensions given for the stage of the Fortune are forty-three feet wide by twenty-seven and a half feet deep; while a typical Chinese stage measures about twenty-five feet in both directions.

We generally think of the Elizabethan stage as

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very primitive, and in this respect the Chinese stage is very much like it, only a bit more so. Both stages lack curtains, and therefore in both properties are brought on in full sight of the audience, making necessary in China the "property men" who furnished so much amusement in the performances of "The Yellow Jacket." Shakespeare however arranged that at the end of a play, for example in "Hamlet", the dead were carried off the stage, while in Peking convention allows that a victim of murder arise and walk off, after having gone through the motion of falling dead. The London theaters also had (at least such seems to have been definitely proved by recent writers) a small curtain at the rear of the stage shutting off a place which served as cave, shop, tomb, bed, Bathsheba's bath, or any other locality that needed to be "discovered." In Peking theaters things are much more conventionalized; a table represents a shop, a blue curtain with lines painted on it, held up by two stage hands, makes a city wall, a chair may be a gate or a prison door, a boat on a lake may be represented simply by the actors appearing with oars with which they seem to be rowing. Much is also symbolized; an actor on the bare stage goes through the motions of opening and shutting a door and thus shows that he has left the house. When a curtain is needed to represent a listener in another room, or a patient in a bed behind drawn curtains, two vertical bamboo poles with a horizontal one attached to them from which the cur-

tain hangs are placed on the stage by the "property men." The arrangement is most primitive and casual; the poles are generally tied to chairs. If the drawing of the "Swan" showing neither an inner stage nor a curtain is authentic, a similar portable curtain may have been the method employed in Elizabethan times. In Peking this is a rich, figured fabric, even though not exactly an "Arras." If a Chinese Polonius were to conceal himself behind the arras, it would have been previously brought on by the "property men" at the beginning of the act or perhaps even just a few moments before it was needed. In a Chinese theater the center back of the stage is a wall hung with a rich piece of tapestry just as free from doors or recesses as the wall of the "Swan." There are doors, however, at both sides of the rear wall, corresponding to those in the "Swan" drawing. As the Chinese theater has no upper stage, men on a city wall, for example, stand on a table behind the curtain held up by the stage hands. A general surveying his troops from a mountain top or a god on his throne in heaven sit on a chair placed on top of a table.

In the paucity of the stage properties we find another parallel. In Albright's "The Shakespearean Stage",¹ the properties are listed, and I can say from my five years' experience that the same and no more are found on the Chinese stage; bedroom: a bed, table, chairs or stools, and lights; a hall: table,

¹ Page 76.

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chairs, and stools; presence chamber: a throne, and occasionally tables and chairs; a church: an altar, and if needed a tomb; prison scenes: usually no properties are mentioned except fetters and chains; woods or park: large and small artificial trees, shrubbery, and benches; shop scenes: a counter and a few wares. The Chinese theater is often even a bit more simple; for example, a chair serves as a throne, or a table with a few decorations as an altar. However, for certain plays fairly elaborate paper properties are used, which are brought on and removed in full sight of the audience. In both theaters the imagination of the audience is strained a great deal more than is the case in a Belasco play; and many conventions that differ from ours, such as bringing on properties in full sight of the audience, seem just as natural as it seems to us that a stage room has only three walls.

Even though the Elizabethan and the Chinese stages have no scenery of any kind, yet it is wrong to imagine that they seem bare, for the color is supplied in the rich and elaborate robes of the actors. A Chinese stage filled with actors in court costumes of yellow, red, black, blue, or purple, with inwoven designs, fierce warriors with masks or painted faces, wearing pheasant feathers six feet long, and lovely maidens in costumes of exquisite pastel shades, walking or running about on a gaudy Oriental rug against a background of rich tapestry, form a veritable riot of color, very similar in its effect, no doubt,



THE ORCHESTRA SEATED IN A CORNER OF THE STAGE

From Jacovleff, "Le Théâtre Chinois"



to what was seen on the Elizabethan stage when the actors appeared in their gowns costing from £80 to £100 in modern money. They were elaborate creations of velvet trimmed with gold and silver lace and embroidery, capped by the "forest of feathers" that Hamlet mentions as necessary for the equipment of an actor, with tapestry from Arras as background. To quote Professor Thorndyke,¹ "No stage cared more for fine clothes than the Elizabethan or lavished a larger portion of its expenses on dress." In both theaters almost no attention is paid to historical appropriateness of costume. Elizabethan actors sometimes wore masks also, just as the Chinese often do.

The stage direction "alarums" for the entry of a king or other important personage, which may never have been associated by the reader with anything definite at all, will be full of meaning to any Westerner who has heard the Chinese orchestra sound the *Leitmotiv* for the entry of a famous general. The Chinese orchestra sits on the stage in full view of the audience, while in Shakespeare's day the upper stage was the normal place for the "noise." The use in the Elizabethan days of the word "noise" for both music and orchestra establishes another great similarity between the two theaters. In Shakespeare's day the music seems to have been confined chiefly to the intermissions between the acts and to occasional songs, while in the Chinese drama almost

¹ *Op. cit.*, page 394.

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every emotional part is punctuated by song. It approaches close to opera in many cases in the number of lines sung by the actors. One division of Chinese plays is that into civil and military, and in the latter the fighting is always accompanied by a terrible din of brass, drum and string music. This frantic noise stimulates in the audience the excitement which the desperate contest in arms is supposed to arouse. As a fact, these military plays are very popular with the masses, and they take up fully half the program.

In the eating, drinking, smoking, hawking, towel-throwing, spitting, and loud interruptions always found in the Chinese theater we have another close parallel to the Elizabethan. It is well known that hawkers went about before and during the performance selling ale, tobacco, and various articles of food. Apples were fought over by young apprentices and sometimes even used to pelt the actors. The women in the galleries were offered pipes to smoke. Young nobles insisted on sitting on the stage in order that they might display themselves and their garments, while pages lighted their pipes for them. The groundlings in the yard were intent on the broad humor and the fighting in the plays. The women of the town in the gallery probably also had other motives for coming besides that of seeing the play. All of this a Westerner can understand very much better after he has seen a Chinese theater, for the conditions are very similar; except that the Chinese lack of pugnacity makes the spectators per-

haps a little less violent.¹ In this connection it is interesting to compare the methods of applause and criticism in Shakespeare's time and in present-day China. Applause was rendered by clapping — some writers refer to it as "thundering" — while disapproval was evinced by hissing, and by even more violent methods, as may be judged from the verse of an Elizabethan drama:

We may be pelted off for aught we know,
With apples, egges, or stones, from thence belowe.

In China applause is expressed by shouting the word "*hao*", good, and disapproval by no more violent method generally than by a sarcastic intonation of the same word! It is difficult for a foreigner to tell which is meant, especially since applause is rendered for subtleties of intonation often lost even on natives. However there is also the word "*t'ung*", which is very rarely used to express disgust with the performance; but when it is employed the actors are driven off the stage in utter shame and confusion. In recent years, however, clapping has been introduced from the West along with many other innovations. But in spite of all distractions one can very often see a Chinese audience sitting spellbound during the recitation of a particularly beautiful passage or the presentation of a tragic scene, as I imagine must have been the case in Shakespearean England also.

¹ See Taine's description, Book II, chapter II, in his "History of English Literature."

Without the aid of scenery or lighting the acting must be splendid to hold an audience, and there is the danger that it become loudly declamatory and bombastic. Hamlet's well-known criticisms frequently apply in Peking, for there are many who mouth their lines so that the town crier could improve upon them, who saw the air too much with their hands, who tear a passion to tatters, who strut and bellow as though one of nature's journeymen had made them, and thus make the judicious grieve. However, good actors of all times avoid this. Hamlet tells of a good actor who

Could force his soul to this conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd;
Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With form to his conceit! and all for nothing!
For Hecuba!

It is similarly impressive to see Mei Lan-fang, for example, playing Mu Lan, the Chinese Joan of Arc, presenting in the first part the coy maiden and loving daughter, and in the second the brave warrior, or to see him (he is an actor who always interprets female rôles) portray the emotions of the daughter who finds her old father in prison but who dares not make herself known. In most theaters in Peking the acting is good, so that the foreigner can often follow the play, even though he does not understand one word of what the actors are saying. For vivid portrayal of emotions, facial expression, and



A CLOWN
Chinese Character Type

When at the end of a scene or lighting the acting must be stopped to lead an audience, and there is the danger that it become loudly declamatory and bombastic. Mandan's well known criticisms frequently apply in Peking, for there are many who mouth their lines so that the town crier could improve upon them, who saw the air too much with their hands, who wear a passion to tatters, who strut and behave as though one of nature's journeymen had made them, and thus make the judicious grieve. However, good actors of all times avoid this. Hamlet tells of a good actor who

Could lose himself to his exactness;
That, like her word, being all his being warr'd;
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and a full-blown passion surging
Would lay him in the dust, and all the watching
For Hecuba!

It is somewhat surprising to see that Lan-fang, for example, playing Mu Lan, the Chinese Joan of Arc, presenting in the first part the young maiden and loving daughter, and in the second the brave warrior, or to see Fan Chen as an actor who always interprets female roles, portray the emotions of the daughter who finds her old father in prison but who dares not make herself known. In most theaters in Peking the acting is good, so that the foreigner can often follow the play, even though he does not understand one word of what the actors are saying. For vivid portrayal of emotions, facial expression, and

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delightful byplay, the Chinese actors are wonderful, just as the scholars conjecture that the English players must have been in Shakespeare's day.

The Chinese audiences demand the fool, the acrobat, and the dancer quite as loudly as they were demanded by the groundling in Shakespeare's time. The Chinese clown is very good at improvising, and provokes the same criticism that Hamlet made, "And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them." Giles in his "History of Chinese Literature" writes in this connection, "As they stand in the classical collections or the acting editions, Chinese plays are as unobjectionable¹ as Chinese poems or general literature. On the stage, however, actors are allowed great license in gagging, and the direction which their gag takes is chiefly the reason which keeps respectable women away from the playhouse." This recalls that in Elizabethan days the respectable women who attended the theater wore masks or made judicious use of their fans to hide their blushes.² It is only in the last few years that the better class of women have begun to attend the theater in Peking; just as the mingling of the sexes in the theater was an innovation in the early seventeenth century in England. In Peking, as formerly was the case in London, the women are admitted to the gallery only.

¹ Page 261. — According to my friend Ferdinand Lessing, a German sinologist, Giles has here made a mistake. In Lessing's words, Chinese plays contain "*faustdicke Zoten*."

² "Shakespeare's England," II, 308ff.

A vital similarity between the two theaters is the fact that women's parts are played by men. The reasons in both cases are moral or Puritanical motives. The similarity in this case is accidental, for it was only about George Washington's time that women were forbidden to appear upon the stage; during the Ming Dynasty many princes and officials had large numbers of actresses in their palaces—a custom that led to gross abuses and immorality. Therefore the early Manchu emperors forbade women to appear as actresses. But things are fast changing in this respect in China, for in some parts of the country men and women appear together on the stage, while in Peking, where this is forbidden by the police, there exist two theaters in which women act both male and female rôles. The Chinese consider the women poor artists, and the connoisseurs do not patronize these theaters, or if they do they apologize for it. A Chinese actor who respects himself will never appear on the same stage with actresses. That the Elizabethans likewise thought women incapable of good acting can be seen from the patronizing tone of Thomas Coryat in which he tells (1611) of having seen women acting in Venice "and they performed it with as good a grace, action, gesture and whatsoever convenient for a player, as ever I saw any masculine actor."¹

In connection with the subject of impersonation

¹ Quoted from "Shakespeare's England", II, 246. See also Thorndyke's "Shakespeare's Theater", page 372.

of the other sex, which we see nowadays only in burlesque or minstrel shows, I should like to quote some observations made by Goethe¹ in Italy on seeing a performance of Goldoni's "La Locandiera" in which a man acted the part of the heroine, the pretty innkeeper. Goethe of course grants that the highest form of art cannot be found in such a representation, but he says that he would like to speak a few words in defense of this practice to tell how one might well derive considerable pleasure from such a performance. He states that he went to the theater with prejudice, but once there he became reconciled to it and even experienced a certain kind of pleasure never felt by him before. He tried to analyze this æsthetic sensation and came to the conclusion it consisted in the enjoyment of the fact that the actor could not possibly play himself, but had to put his art of imitation to a far greater test, that of holding the mirror up to life in a sex not his own. The spectator enjoys a much more self-conscious delusion, just as when he sees a young man playing the part of Rip Van Winkle or King Lear. There is a more conscious æsthetic pleasure in seeing how well a young man has studied the actions of a young girl in order to present a Rosalind, or how perfectly Mei Lan-fang can copy the dainty dress, actions, and walk of a Chinese lady. My experience has been that this is much more pleasant than to see round-

¹ Goethe, "Frauenrollen auf dem römischen Theater von Männern gespielt."

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cheeked girls essay the rôles of fearful generals or cruel husbands in the woman's theater in Peking.

It has often been remarked that as a result of the fact that boy actors played the women's parts in the Elizabethan theater we find Shakespeare's heroines very frequently masquerading as pages. Julia, Portia, Nerissa, Jessica, Viola, Rosalind, and Imogen all appear as handsome youths. An analogous result in the Chinese theater of to-day is that the heroines appear in an endless number of cases as warriors. The Chinese have not only their Mu Lan (who goes to war in her father's place because the latter is old and feeble), but very many other heroines who invariably defeat men in battle. Chinese history or legend does not account for this, but it is due to the fact that the actors who portray women seek opportunities to display their skill in fighting. This fighting is a highly conventionalized art, a combination of dancing and acrobatics performed to a deafening and exciting music, which, in regard to its place on the program, can best be compared to our ballet. Most foreigners in Peking are kept away from the theater by the fearful noise made in these "fighting plays", as they are called, but if these same people could attend an Elizabethan theater they would possibly find that the great delight of the audiences was the "noise" (music), the clatter and scuffle of the battles, the drums, the squibs, and the cannon.¹

¹ "Shakespeare's England", page 252ff.

ANALOGIES—EAST AND WEST

There are in Peking three companies of boy actors, the largest of which has about three hundred in its theater. These are training schools for actors in which the boys of eight to sixteen or eighteen years are given very arduous courses in singing, acrobatics, stage fighting, and all the other arts that an actor requires. The competition of these "little eyases" in Peking might well arouse the ire of some of the regular actors, as it did Shakespeare's ("Hamlet", II, 2, 362), for in China the life of the common actor is a hard one, most of them eking out a meager living at about twenty cents a day.

The position of the actor in society is very low in Peking, just as it was in London. A Chinese moralist might well apply to them the words written in 1759:¹ "Players are masters of vice, teachers of wantonnesse, spurres to impuritie, the Sonnes of idlenesse, so longe as they live in this order, loathe them." Under the former dynasty the actors and their sons, together with the sons of prostitutes, jailers, and lictors, were not eligible for taking the examinations. Even now they usually intermarry only among their own number, and they suffer also from various other discriminations. Most of them were catamites, until the Republic abolished this formerly legalized institution. Mei Lan-fang, an actor who has risen to high perfection in his art, as well as to great wealth, an artist who may tour America in the near future, would have

¹ "Shakespeare's England", II, 241.

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ample reason in the present organization of Chinese society to reproach Fortune in Shakespeare's words:

That did not better for my life provide,
Than public means which public manners breeds,
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
Pity me then and wish I were renewed.

Peoples are alike and differ also in what they consider to be humorous. It has been said that the first comedy was the torture of a captive by his enemies. This sort of performance would nowadays of course be impossible; yet in most of our comedies we enjoy heartily the discomfiture of victims of circumstances. We have not yet become too refined to enjoy the difficulties of a man whose senses are benumbed by alcohol, of a bald man, a lame man, yes, even a deaf man. The condition of a blind man, however, strikes us as too tragic to figure in a comedy, and no modern comedian could draw a laugh from his audience by fooling a tottering old man bereft of his sight. Yet every one who has seen "The Merchant of Venice" acted recalls very well what Launcelot Gobbo does to his blind old father, and I have seen in Chinese theaters how a blind old beggar deceived by a clown affords huge amusement to the audience.

As I have already stated, Chinese and Elizabethan audiences are alike also in that they use their imaginations much more vividly than we do. For them

a draped screen represents a city wall, and the bare stage any country, a ship, a mountain, any house, a street, or whatever is needed in the particular scene acted. Warriors on horseback in the Chinese theaters carry whips to let the audience know that they are mounted on chargers, while Macbeth and Banquo rode on the stage on hobbyhorses—and were taken seriously. I recall a performance in the Chinese City in which there suddenly came running on the stage on all fours a man in a tiger skin, and I laughed because of droll recollections of Shaw's "Androcles and the Lion." But no one else laughed; to the Chinese present it was a tiger, just as real a tiger as the actors on the stage were for the moment real kings and queens, soldiers and servants. Of this particular illusion more anon.

Because there are many similarities in the theaters, stages, actors, conventions, audiences, and the psychology of the spectator of Shakespeare's day and of present-day Peking, I certainly should be the last to say that because a thing is so in local theaters, it must have been identical in London three hundred years ago. Yet it seems that since human nature is very much the same everywhere, it would be safer, if one wished to hazard conjectures as to what was true in the past, to take a living example of the theater on the same level of culture, than to look back at the Elizabethan stage in the light of what has been accomplished since, and what happens to be the fad at the present time. This is the day of stage light-

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ing and color effects, of Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt, and Bakst, but we should hardly think that these problems troubled Burbage, who had neither electric light nor scenery, and who performed his plays on an uncurtained stage by daylight. Yet Professor H. T. Stephenson of Indiana University, for fifteen years a lecturer on Shakespeare, author of "Shakespeare's London", and "The Elizabethan People", by profession a specialist in reconstructing the times of "Merrie England", discusses seriously in his very stimulating "Study of Shakespeare" (page 40) the plight of the stage manager of Shakespearean days, who could never tell beforehand how the gaily dressed young nobles sitting on the stage would fit into his color scheme! He also believes that changes in the stage setting could not have been made in full sight of the audience, because "this would have upset entirely the unity if not the gravity of the piece."

In Peking one can see very remarkable things on the stage that fail to upset the gravity of any present except the Westerners, who are used to different conventions in the theater. Professor Stephenson, with the results of three hundred years of stage experience at his hand, believes that the Elizabethans must have been fools if they could not have thought of the same useful devices for the theater that he knows of. To quote (page 47):

"To my mind the situation suggested by these facts reduces itself almost to a mathematical prob-

lem; if one of us can easily invent such a staging for an Elizabethan scene, as any ingenious person could construct out of what we know they had in those days, is it unfair to assume that the ingenious Elizabethans did as well if not better? More likely better. They were more used than we are to making a little go a great way." He even goes on to explain how one could put up a curtain, simply by the use of canvas, wire, a few rings, and presto, the thing is done. A play without the commonplace scenic devices of the twentieth century is unthinkable to him.

Another theorist is Mr. Corbin, in the *Century Magazine* for December, 1911. He proves to his own satisfaction that Burbage and his colleagues had means for darkening the stage.¹ It seems this author staged "The Winter's Tale" in New York a few years ago. In this play a bear has to appear on the stage, and this part was acted by a man on all fours. At first the scene was played on a lighted stage, and all the New Yorkers present laughed at the sight of the actor in a bearskin. Then they hit upon the device of darkening the stage, and having the actor-bear run quickly across. When this was done, no one's risibilities were affected. This forms one of Mr. Corbin's chief arguments for his assumption that the Elizabethan stage was darkened; namely,

¹ Thorndyke, page 138, refers to this article, but takes no stock in Mr. Corbin's arguments. He says that darkness was symbolized by lighted candles, etc., which is precisely the thing done on the Chinese stage.

that it would have offended the good taste of the audience to see in broad daylight in a serious scene, an actor impersonating a bear. If human nature can endure this convention in Peking, with the above-mentioned tiger, why should we assume that three hundred years ago people felt as we do now, and base on this the novel theory that stages were darkened in those days?

A large measure of the success attained by "The Yellow Jacket" was due to the fact that the Chinese stage conventions employed seemed so funny to us provincial Westerners that they caused a great deal of happy laughter. But this is really quite as intelligent as the attitude of the rustic who sought out Richard III after the performance and offered to sell him a good horse for less than a kingdom. It is very strange that even otherwise scholarly men, like, for example, Victor Albright in "The Shakespearean Stage", struggle with all fours against the possibility that in the theater of the gentle Shakespeare there might have been committed such desecrations as setting properties on the stage in full view of the audience. He approaches the evidence with blinkers when it seems to contradict his theory. He says (page 126): "Only the dramatists had not yet learned to use explicit stage directions." On page 143 he tells us that the Elizabethans did not read stage directions literally. Then on page 106: "Here in the midst of a street scene is a direction to set the stage with a table, stand, chairs, stools, etc.,

— just such properties as are used in the next scene, a counting room. We cannot believe that a manager would disturb an important scene by setting the stage for a coming one." Further, on page 110: "The placing and replacing of a regular setting in full view of the audience never was a *general custom*. It is contrary to the very nature of the stage, — an illusive, make-believe world." In my opinion it is contrary only to the very nature of a provincial New Yorker.

Let me add in passing that William Archer holds that "in the generality of cases properties were brought on in full sight of the audience, often in the middle of the action."¹

Doctor Albright, in "The Shakespearean Stage" (pages 122ff.) condemns with sarcasm (which seems well merited) the theory of Brodmeier, who holds that the entire stage in Shakespeare's theater was curtained from view. But I should like to question whether or not his own judgments would have been quite the same if he had known the Chinese stage before he wrote his estimable thesis. A Chinese actor walks once around the stage in full view of the audience, and in conformity with the ruling conventions he has traveled miles, or hundreds of miles, as the plot requires. Doctor Albright, arguing backwards from the Restoration staging, comes to the conclusion that there was in the Elizabethan theater a regular changing from

¹ "Shakespeare's England", II, 301.

inner to outer scenes, and vice versa, and that the few pieces of furniture which constituted the stage setting were always carefully shut off from the view of the audience. He quotes an example with his comment from a play called "Pinner of Wakefield", Act IV, Scenes 3-4. "Jenkins enters a shoemaker's shop, and dares the owner to meet him at 'the towne's end.' The challenge is accepted, and after a certain amount of stage business, *during which the curtains must have been closed* [italics mine], Jenkins says, 'Now we are at the towne's end, what say you now?'" However, I should add that in his concluding paragraph Doctor Albright is by no means dogmatic, but gives this merely as his theory, stating that there is absolutely no way of proving it.

With all the striking similarities in the Shakespearean and the Chinese theater there are of course also vast differences, especially in the background of the two. So far as I know there has never existed in China a manner of staging which could in any way be compared to the medieval system of mansions. Likewise the evolution of the platform stage into the picture-frame stage of the present day makes it seem that even on the projecting stage the feeling for the need of the curtain for the sake of the illusion increased as time went on. I repeat that I have not the slightest intention of arguing from certain conventions on the Chinese stage that they must have been identical in Elizabethan times. My point is simply that scholars ought not to assert that

certain primitive conventions are "against the nature of the stage" or "contrary to human nature", for this point of view is based on the current conventions with which the particular writer is acquainted. I should like to quote the concluding words of Doctor Albright's thesis, spoken out of the depth of his experience of wrestling for years with the problems we are discussing. He calls an article by William Archer "one of the most original and enlightening articles on the Shakespearean stage that has yet appeared." He says further about this writer, "As a learned dramatic critic of to-day, he approaches the Elizabethan stage with that special insight and ability which a closet student cannot hope to have. The stage and the staging have changed since the days of Shakespeare, but the mimic world is still the mimic world; and the deeper the scholar is grounded in the stage of to-day, the better he is qualified to study the stage of yesterday." And, allow me to add, the knowledge of a living stage at a similar period of culture will likewise add to his qualifications to study the theater of the past.



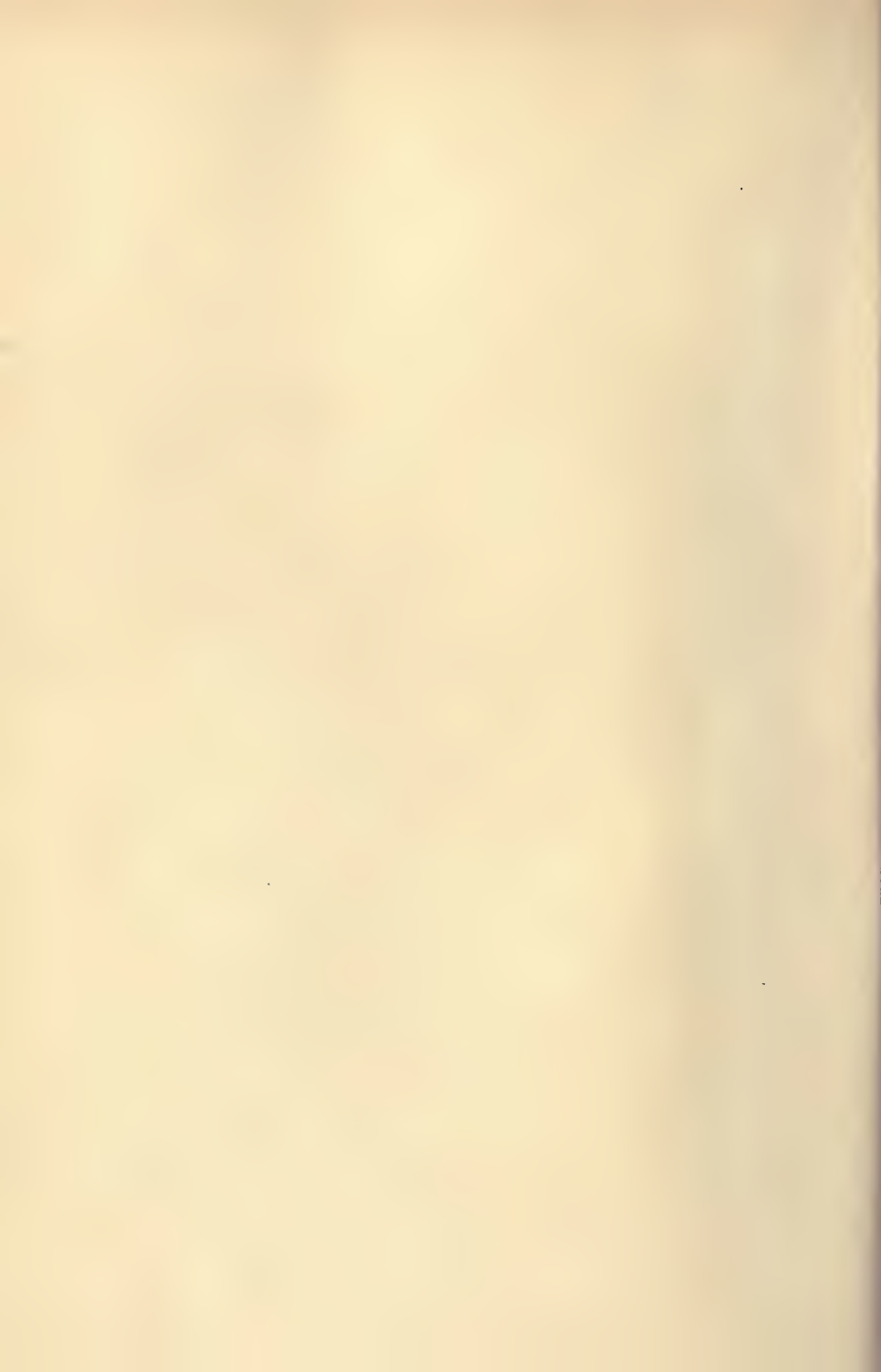
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

B.C.

- 2705-2595 Huang Ti, mythological emperor.
 2357-2206 Legendary sages to whose teachings Confucius harked back.
 551 Birth of Confucius.
 255-206 Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, the emperor who burned the books and built the Great Wall.
 206 B.C. to Han Dynasty—Recovery of literature—
 221 A.D. Introduction of Buddhism.

A.D.

- 221-265 The "Three Kingdoms" — Age of romantic chivalry.
 618-906 The T'ang Dynasty—Emperor Ming Huang, traditional founder of the theater, and his consort Yang Kuei-fei, China's most famous beauty. China was at this time the most civilized country in the world. Li Po and other great lyric poets.
 960-1127 The Sung Dynasty — Development of landscape painting.
 1280-1368 The Yuan or Mongol Dynasty — Classical age of Chinese drama. Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan. Marco Polo.
 1368-1644 The Ming Dynasty—Restoration of Chinese rulers — Drama in the hands of scholars.
 1644-1911 The Ch'ing or Manchu Dynasty—Emperors K'ang Hsi and Ch'ien Lung encourage arts and letters, including the theater.
 1912- The Republic.





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Not translated into any European language.

Théâtre Chinois, ou Choix de Pièces de Théâtre Composées sous les Empereurs Mongols. Bazin Ainé. Paris, 1838.

Four Yuan Dynasty plays translated by a French sinologue who was for years Professor of Chinese at the Ecole des Langues Orientales.

Chine Moderne, ou Description Historique, Géographique, et Littéraire de ce vaste Empire, d'après des Documents Chinois. Paris, 1853.

In the second part of this volume M. Bazin gives numerous discussions of Chinese plays with summaries of their plots. Very valuable work.

Le Pi-Pa-Ki, ou L'Histoire du Luth. Traduit sur le texte original par M. Bazin Ainé. Paris, 1841.

Contains also a very good introduction to this important Ming drama.

L'Orphelin de la Chine. Drame en prose et en vers, accompagné des pièces historiques qui en ont fourni le sujet, de nouvelles et de poésies chinoises traduit de chinois par Stanislas Julien. Paris, 1834.

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A complete translation by the famous French sinologue of the Yuan drama, *The Orphan of the Chao Family*. Voltaire made an abridged version by a Jesuit missionary the basis of his *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (1755), a stiff and artificial piece, presenting a Genghis Khan who falls in love in the manner of a French courtier of the 18th century.

L'Histoire du Cercle de Craie. Traduit du chinois par Stanislas Julien. London, 1832.

Translation of a Yuan drama.

The Sorrows of Hân. Translated by John Francis Davis, F.R.S. London, 1829.

A Yuan drama translated by a British sinologue; *The Fortunate Union*, a Chinese romance, appears in the same volume.

Le Chagrin dans le Palais de Han. Louis Laloy. Publié par la Société littéraire de France. Paris, 1921.

M. Laloy's version of this Yuan drama attempts to introduce some modern motivation. In his preface the author expresses the fear that in working over this Chinese tragedy "*il l'a défigurée en tachant de l'embellir*", and perhaps his fears were justified.

La Chine Familière et Galante. Jules Arène. Paris, 1876.

In this volume by a French consul "*qui contient des détails fort curieux et intéressants sur les chinois, et surtout sur les chinoises*" are printed translations of four realistic comedies of popular life, "*sorte de vaudeville au gros sel, où, en gestes comme en paroles, la license chinoise se donne libre carrière*." About ninety pages are devoted to the theater.

The Chinese Drama. William Stanton. Kelly and Walsh. Hongkong, 1899.

A British colonial official has translated three plays, *The Willow Lute*, *The Golden-leaved Chrysanthemum*, and *The Sacrifice for the Soul of Ho Man Sau*. In an introduction of eighteen pages the author discusses the types and conventions of the Chinese stage as seen in Hongkong and Canton. It is interesting to note that in general the southern theater is identical with that of Peking, but that there are some variations, particularly in customs and ceremonials.

Catching a Golden Tortoise.

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Beating the Gold Bough.

Two Chinese plays translated by Charles Budd, Tung Wen Kuan Translation Office, Shanghai, 1913. Short and mildly interesting plays, translated partly for the purpose of aiding Chinese who wish to learn English.

Chinesische Schattenspiele. Übersetzt von Wilhelm Grube, herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Berthold Laufer, Verlag der königlich bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. München, 1915.

A huge volume containing in translation the entire repertoire of a company of shadow players which Berthold Laufer, Curator of the Field Museum, had bought in Peking in 1901 and which were translated by the famous German sinologue. Though these plays are not presented on the stage, but recited by shadow players to accompany the movements of their puppets that cast shadows on a screen, yet the plots are the same as those of the theater. The book thus serves as a wonderful source for some one wishing to familiarize himself with Chinese plays. Berthold Laufer has prefaced the book with a meaty introduction.

Pekinger Volksleben. Wilhelm Grube. Berlin, 1901.

Sociological studies on popular customs and usages in Peking. A chapter is devoted to the theater in which numerous summaries of modern plays are given. The author also deals with related subjects: acrobats, story-tellers, annual ceremonies of guilds, etc.

Geschichte der chinesischen Litteratur. Wilhelm Grube. Leipzig, 1909.

Several chapters are devoted to the drama. Professor Grube, in his discussion of Yuan and Ming plays, is using Bazin's translations, but in his evaluation of modern plays he is drawing on his long and intimate experience with the theater in Peking.

A History of Chinese literature. Herbert A. Giles. Heinemann, London.

This well-known sinologue devotes two chapters to the drama, but they are not up to the standard of the rest of this excellent work. Pi-Pa-Chi is the most modern drama he discusses.

THE CHINESE THEATER

Das Theater und Drama der Chinesen. Rudolf von Gottschall. Breslau, 1887.

This small volume of 209 pages was written by a minor German dramatist without first-hand knowledge of China. The author based his study upon French translations of older dramas. Yet the book is not lacking in remarks showing a keen insight into the Chinese character.

La Littérature Chinoise Contemporaine. Soong Tsung Faung, *Journal de Pékin*. Peking, 1919.

A volume by a professor of literature at the National University, Peking, in which his critical articles from Peking's French paper are reprinted. Forty-seven pages are devoted to the theater under headings such as the following: "Origin of the Drama", "Evolution of the Modern Chinese Theater", "Ibsenism in China", etc. Professor Soong follows to a certain extent Wang Kuo-wei's History of the Drama under the Sung and Ming Dynasties. His thorough knowledge of the European stage enables him to make very striking comparisons.

Peking, A Social Survey. Sidney Gamble and Stewart J. Burgess. Doran, 1921.

The chapter "Recreations" in this interesting and painstaking survey presents statistics on the number of theaters, their locations, prices of admission, status of the actor and actress, etc.

En Chine, Mœurs et Institutions, Hommes et Faits. Maurice Courant. Paris, 1901.

The French diplomat devotes one chapter to the theater. He writes before the Revolution, but most things connected with the theater have been changed very little. He reports one abuse, however, which the Revolution (1912) abolished. Page 144: "*La prostitution féminine reste discrète, car la femme est toujours tenue à l'écart; mais la prostitution masculine s'étale au grand jour; il n'est guère de partie de théâtre où l'amphitryon ne réunisse ses amis d'abord au restaurant et ne convie quelques jeunes garçons de bonne mine, richement habillés, sachant causer et rendre le vin plus agréable*"; ils plaisantent et rient avec les convives, les accompagnent au théâtre et restent avec eux jusqu'à ce que, la fête finie, chacun rentre chez soi. Naturellement, aux simples lettrés on ne demande que leur bonne humeur, et ce sont les

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riches qui paient la note; bien de fils de famille se ruinent de cette façon."

The Yellow Jacket. A Chinese play done in the Chinese manner, in three acts, by George C. Hazelton and Benrimo. Bobbs-Merrill, 1913.

This play represents a unique example of Chinese influence producing a worth-while drama on our stage. Will Irwin was kind enough to write to me concerning its origin:

"... I can tell you the history of the play. Harry Benrimo, actor and stage-director, is a native of San Francisco. He saw much of the Chinese in California. His father was a contractor, employing Chinese labor and doing business with Chinese merchants. As a young actor, Benrimo became interested in the Chinese theaters of San Francisco. That was the golden age of the Chinese theater in America. The price of admission made the Jackson Street Company and the Washington Street Company rich on Chinese standards and they were able to get some great actors — just as the money from the Metropolitan Opera drew Caruso from Italy. Ah Chic, leading tragedian of the Jackson Street Company, was as great an actor as I ever saw. . . . Benrimo sketched out a scenario made not from any one Chinese play, but from a dozen — situations or bits of business or dialogue which he remembered from his old days in San Francisco theaters. Benrimo called into collaboration the late George Hazelton, playwright. On this scenario they worked out The Yellow Jacket. . . . Several Chinese, notably one man — name forgotten — from the Consulate helped with the rehearsals. Deliberately the authors took certain liberties with Chinese drama and psychology in order to make the play effective for an Occidental audience. Notably, they made the love of man for woman the main theme. One piece of business, I remember, caused endless dispute. It is where the happy and united lovers kiss. That would not happen, of course, with the Chinese. Benrimo understood that perfectly. But he said that an Occidental audience would expect it. And he had his way. I remember that whenever this piece of business occurred in the rehearsals, the man from the Consulate used to giggle.

"Lately I was talking over The Yellow Jacket with Percy Hammond, dramatic critic. 'Do you know what made it a success?' he said, 'The Property Man as played by Shaw.' Possibly he's right about that. But the play served its artistic purpose. It made American audiences understand something of this extraordinary art. And I've no doubt but

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that if Hazelton and Benrimo had stuck close to the originals our audiences would n't have understood half so well."

So far as my experience goes, making love the main theme is not un-Chinese, but The Property Man as played on our stages is. Possibly Cantonese usage differs in this respect, but in Peking property men are always on the stage, coolies dressed in shabby blue cotton, but they are conspicuous only to the Westerner not used to Chinese conventions. They by no means have the importance attached to them in The Yellow Jacket. Compare the chapter, "External Aspects."

The Chinese Drama. R. F. Johnston. Kelly & Walsh, 1921.

A slender volume that came to be written because the publishing firm had four paintings of Chinese actors which they wanted to issue in calendar form with a few words of comment from the well-known sinologue. Mr. Johnston became absorbed in the subject and wrote so much and so interestingly on it that Kelly & Walsh decided to make a book out of it. The text is much better than the pictures.

Le Théâtre Chinois. Chu Chia-chien. Paris, 1922.

The chief features of this book are the excellent paintings and sketches made in Peking theaters by the Russian artist, Alexandre Jacovleff. An English edition has been published by Putnam. No other book can give such a vivid notion of the real appearance as well as the spirit of the Chinese stage as this volume of inspired drawings. M. Chu Chia-chien, instructor in the École des Langues Orientales in Paris, writes well, but too briefly, on the conditions and conventions of the Chinese stage.

Chinesische Literatur. Eduard Erkes. Hirt, Breslau, 1924.

A brief, but up-to-the-minute sketch of Chinese literature. This volume by a University of Leipzig Privatdozent is one of a series on the literatures of various nations. The book came to me too late to include what it said on the origin of the theater in China in the text, and therefore I shall quote an interesting paragraph here. (The author speaks of the Pear Garden origin as a myth and says that the Chinese had a theater as early as other nations):

"Es hat sich aus den bei festlichen Gelegenheiten aller Art, bei Krieg und Jagd, bei Opfer und Gelage, inszenierten Tänzen entwickelt, in denen man vorher im Spiel darstellte, was sich nachher zutragen sollte, um so auf magische Weise das Ge-

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schick günstig zu lenken, und nachher seiner Freude mimischen Ausdruck verlieh. Zu diesen Tänzen sang man Wechselgesänge mit Rede und Gegenrede, wie solche uns anscheinend aus mehreren Liedern des Schi-king erhalten sind, so dass das China der Urzeit auch hierin das Leben anderer primitiver Völker geführt hat. Aus Südchina sind uns Texte solcher Dramen religiösen Charakters, wie sie auch K'üh Yüan im dritten Jahrhundert vor Christo bearbeitete, mehrfach überliefert, und bereits aus dem Jahre 545 v. Chr. haben wir eine Notiz nach der bei Tempelfesten, ganz ähnlich wie im alten Hellas, nach den ernstesten Schaustellungen eine Burleske von den Stallknechten aufgeführt wurde. Das zeigt also, dass die dramatische Kunst der Tang-Zeit nicht einen Anfang, sondern nur eine späte Etappe auf einem langen Wege bedeutet. Auch die Han-Zeit hatte ihre Singspiele, die bereits mit einem umfangreichen szenischen Apparat aufgeführt wurden und vielleicht kompliziertere Bühneneinrichtungen voraussetzen lassen, als sie das heutzutage an Einfachheit unserer modernsten Schaubühne ebenbürtige — vielleicht für sie vorbildlich gewordene? — chinesische Theater jetzt bietet."
 Pages 58-59.

Altchinesische Liebeskomödien, aus dem chinesischen Urtexte ausgewählt und übertragen von Hans Rudelsberger. Kunstverlag von Anton Schroll & Co. Wien, 1923.

Free translations of five comedies of love (among them two comedies discussed in this book on pages 33 and 96). The work is a splendid specimen of book-making with five colored illustrations by the Chinese artist Hua Mei-chai and numerous woodcuts from the original Chinese editions.

Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

This very interesting journal, so far as I have been able to examine the files, contains only two articles on the theater: Volume XX, "Chinese Theatricals", and Volume XXI, "Histrionic Notes." Neither is very important.

This bibliography is by no means exhaustive. There are a great many articles not mentioned here, but they are generally not very instructive. In most cases they are written by travelers who note the obvious things about the Chinese theater. Naturally there is also a great deal of repetition in these writings.



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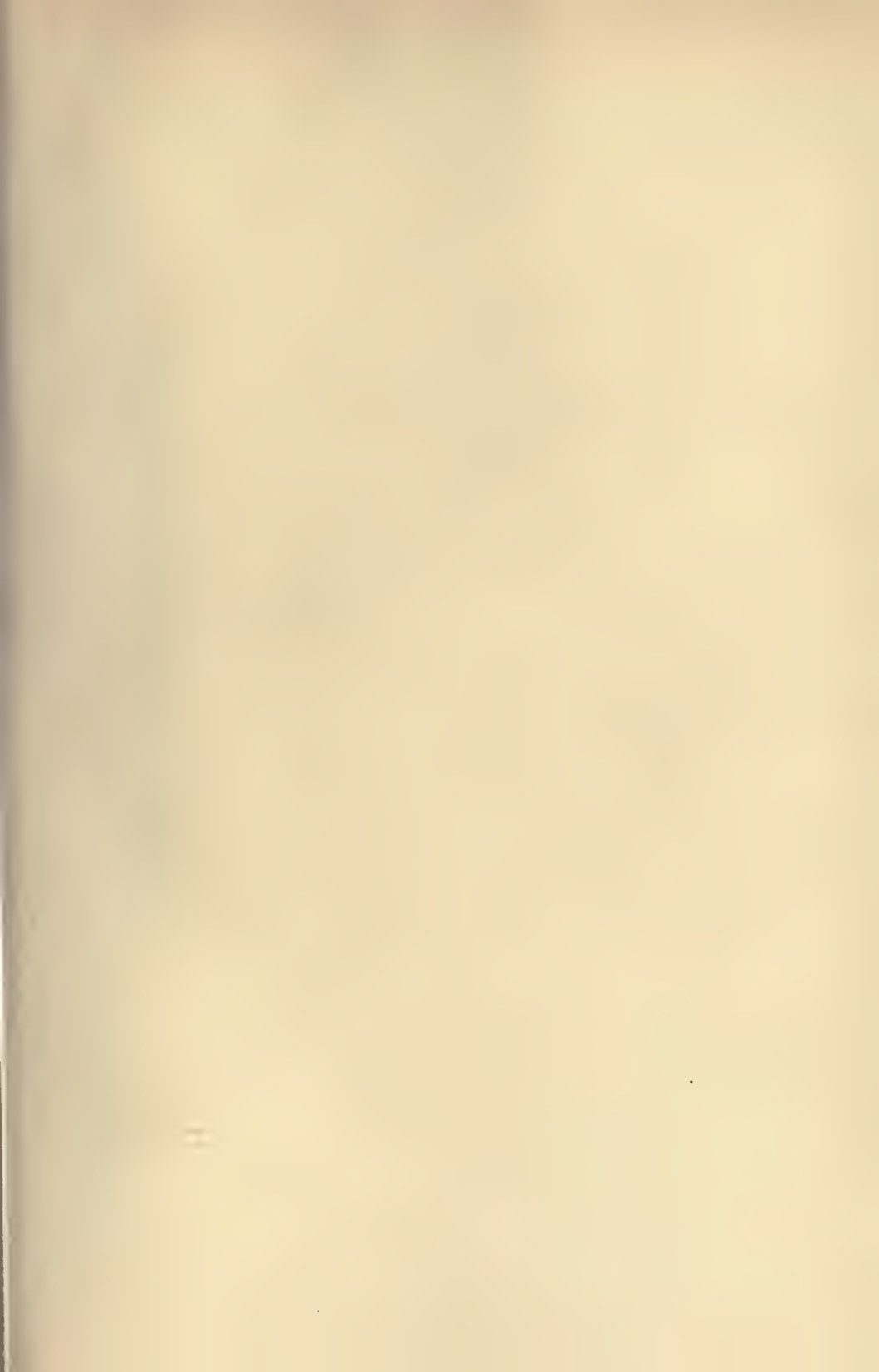
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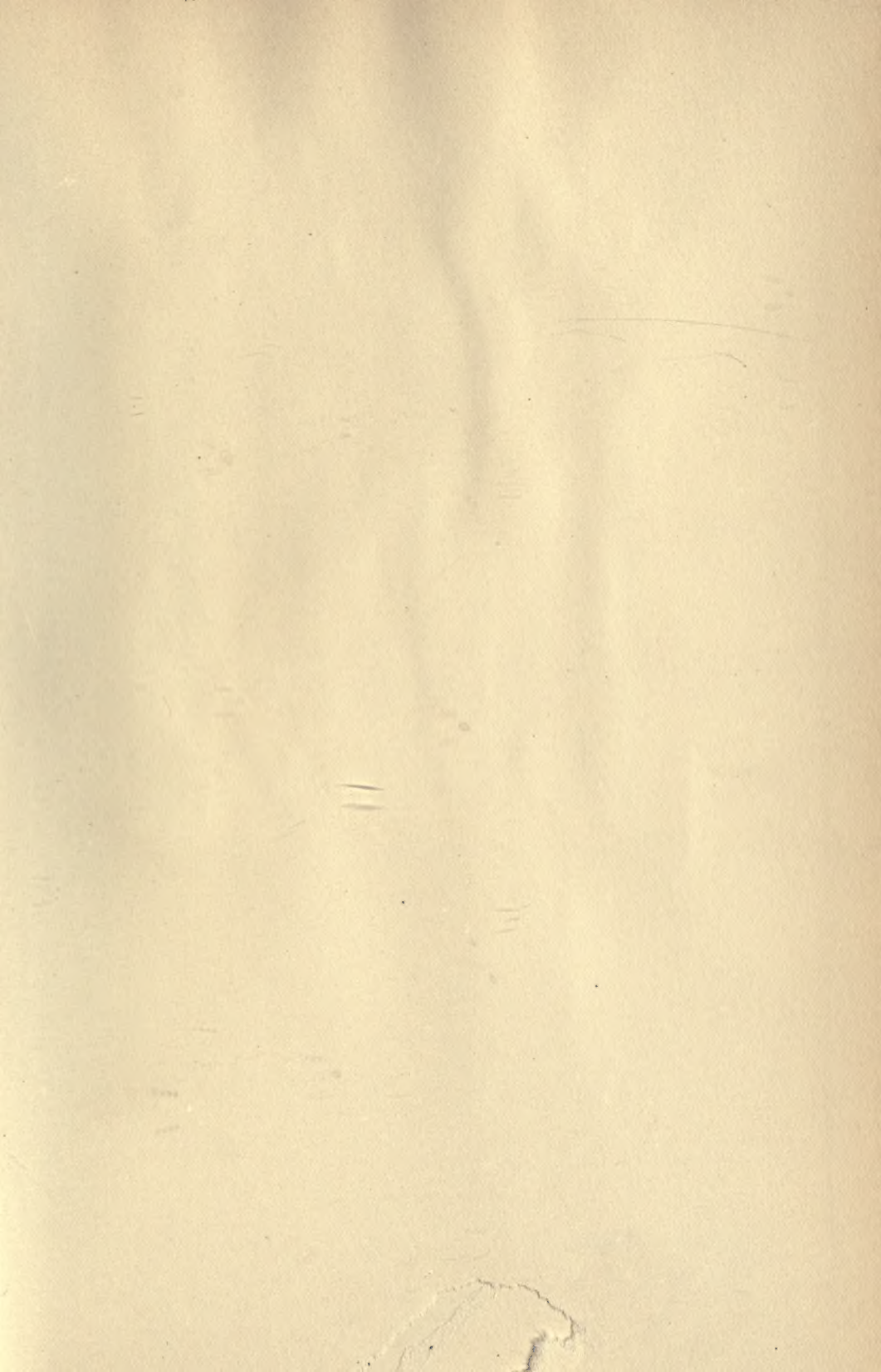
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